

The Setting Sun by minttmocha

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Summary:

Minho's teeth bare, a low snarling growl escaping, violently.

Shadows in the hall, until they soon become solid forms in front of them.

“It’s okay hyung. It’s my pack.” Jeongin says, voice on the verge of a crying whine. “They found me.”

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Minho has given up a long time ago of ever getting out. Just another omega, bought and sold into the underground omega slave trade. Until Jeongin.

With him and his pack, he finds something within himself he thought he lost for good.

Notes:

your support means so much. thank you!!

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this chapter is brought to you by the lost kitten that showed up at work who we are trying desperately to catch, so that they don't freeze tonight.

Chapter 1

Chapter Text

“This one again?” A voice says gruffly, amusement clouding his tone, as fingers dig into his arms, dragged harshly through the backdoors of the building. He wants to tell the alpha prick that he doesn’t need to be dragged, that he will follow them obediently, that this isn’t his first time in an auction house. That he’s no fool, he knows what happens if he tries to run. He has had it happen already, many times. He doesn’t want another.

He shudders at the memory, Minho does not want to have another run in like that. Besides, he’s older now, tired, worn out. Exhausted from this life. Running away, is useless.

Nearing thirty, he’s not some pretty young, docile omega. Innocent, and virginal. He’s broken in, used up.

He’s already broken.

But it turns out he doesn’t need to say anything, the alpha’s grip tightens painfully on his arm, as he says, “yep. Guess that old fucker found him too old after all.”

If this were a few years ago, Minho would let a snarl slip out, a warning. A *challenge*. He would claw and scrape, and do whatever it takes not to lose himself completely. He’d try to run again, he’d try to fight. He wouldn’t take it lying down.

But all those instincts, and thoughts are tampered, brought to submission when the alpha’s fingers press into the back of his neck.

Sometimes memory is just pain. And that’s all he feels as he’s reminded of what waits him if he doesn’t. *obey*. That’s all his life is now. Moments of reprieve, and endless hurt. Like metal on his tongue, sliced up his throat, down his nose. Into his sternum.

His body slumps, eyes casting downward as the alpha in the intake says, “bring him in with the rest. We’ll be starting shortly, we’ll

lucky to get a couple of hundred for him. If not, the brothel on tenth is always looking for more used up whores.”

Minho jostles inwardly, but doesn't show it as he's dragged further into the building, into a backroom with too many cages. There are omegas everywhere here, and Minho's instincts go on haywire when he sees them, smells them, feels their soft omegan whimpers as he enters. They're pleading with him, the way omegas do, especially the younger ones to the older, quietly, urgently. One look, and they understand each other, scents turn bitter and agonized, and luring him in.

Not sexually, a different kind of luring.

“Enough!” An alpha barks.

They stop, and Minho is thrown into a cage quickly, lock tight on the bars.

It's a familiar sight.

He just hopes his next owner isn't mean.

Or has an owner at all.

He's heard the horror stories of brothels. How alphas get out of control, killing in the heat of it all. Clawing an omega's throat to shreds as they fuck them. An owner is preferable. Even if they're a little more sadistic, and arrogant.

But this last one was weird, but he mostly left Minho alone. Too old to get it up all that often, too sick most of the time to notice. It was the perfect escape. He only had to spread his legs a few times. And it was always quick. Never lingered, or took too long. It wasn't prolonged.

It was the best place he's been.

But now, he's brought back.

Back here. Back to be sold again.

His head lowers, but he freezes when he hears a soft sniffing from next to him. It makes him perk up, more so, when the scent hits him. A deep, rich jasmine, mixed with something a little softer, more contained, neutral even, underneath. Slightly minty, citrus. A faintness to it, barley there below the surface. Most newly presented pups would never be able to pick up on it, even those that have been presented for a while might not notice it, but Minho has always picked up on the subtle. On the smallest details.

Has he had to, in order to survive. He learned, adapted, honed in on it. He does it now.

The omegan scent is strong on this pup, but underneath his true, silent, barely there- not yet presented scent is noticeable to himself. It's there. It draws him in.

Minho's eyes widen, and he turns towards the young pup, feels his heart tighten as big teary eyes look up at him. Soft dark hair pressing into his face a little. Strong jaw trembling. Fingers tightly curled into himself.

Minho sucks in a breath.

"...you're just a puppy." He says, voice hoarse and rough from disuse.

He can't remember the last time he spoke.

He feels thirsty almost immediately.

The young pup can't be more than eighteen, and even then, that's pushing it, Minho is certain.

"I'm not a p- pup." The voice is deeper than Minho was expecting, but shaky, and unconvincing of his words.

His inner omega whines, claws desperately to the surface, and Minho feels his hands reaching out before he can stop himself. They hover there, the young pup's eyes wide on them, looking from his outstretched hands, back to Minho again, and Minho, he doesn't know what to do. He's never done this before.

But the pup answers for him, eyes welling up completely, and collapsing forward into him then, pressing into his chest, to his sternum where only hurt has been for so many years, hiccupping sobs.

Minho's answer is immediate.

He wraps his arms around him, and brings him in close, even if uncertain consciously, unconsciously, his instincts know what to do. Responding quickly, equally, gently.

He's in a haze, of omegan instinct that grows so strong he could drown in it. And in the pup's scent. The minty, citrus, he breathes it in so deeply, rubbing his own yuzu scent in deep. They mix together almost painfully well as he scents the pup. Feels the pup scent him back. There are no words spoken, just heady gulps of scent, and warm skin pressed against warm skin.

Minho has never been this close to anyone, has never felt this need before, inner omega clawing desperately to do more. His skin burning up at every press.

He can tell the pup is close. Close to a presentation, and it sends Minho's heart rate through the roof. Anxiety claws, as he tries to push it down, not let it show. The jasmine omegan scent clinging to him so deeply isn't from him. It's someone else that has scented him in a haze of fresh heat, clinging to the pup for days, maybe even weeks. Which is what the omega hunters must have thought when they found him.

"Shh... it's okay, pup, you're okay... hyung's here." He murmurs, voice rough with unuse.

The pup calms down, taking shaky, trembling breaths in his arms, looking up at him then, young, scared, and innocent.

"M- My pack... they... they'll come for me." He says firmly, so sure it hurts a little.

Minho feels a spike of jealousy then, envy, and hurt. '*But you're mine,*' he resists the urge to growl. He can't believe how close he

comes to doing it to. He's never had such a strong reaction, or difficulty controlling himself, especially in the last few years, as slowly, but surely, he's given up. Waiting for the day, one of this owners finally goes too far, and kills him.

These hunters are fierce.

These alphas are the most evil.

But they're also very smart, and their network expands across the city, maybe even further. Nobody ever makes it out.

Still, Minho smiles a little, attempts to- first time in years he does, trying to smile, and runs his hand along the pup's hair, nodding. Agreeing even though he doesn't believe it. Knows better.

The pup seems a little more at ease at the confirmation, even though Minho's gut twists at the lie of it.

"I'm Jeongin." He mumbles, moving in closer, eyes shifting a little to the other omegas around them in cages, the alphas far away but keeping tabs. "But my pack calls me Innie."

Minho heart sparks a little, nodding as he looks into those pretty eyes. No wonder the hunters thought he was an omega.

"Mm. Jeongin." He repeats.

The pup's eyes grow confused, and a little off-put. "*Innie*."

Minho feels another spark, heart picking up, he gulps. *'but I'm not pack!'* He wants to protest, and, *'won't they be angry?'* But within, his inner omega purrs approvingly. He is. Pack.

Pup.

Innie.

Is, *his*.

"Innie." He corrects, and then for the first time in years, speaks his name. "I- I'm Lee Minho."

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He doesn't know what to do.

Jeongin is shaking slightly in his arms, looking through the bars of their cage, as the alphas come in and out, gathering omegas one by one. They hook up a chain to the metal collar around all their necks, dragging them out to be paraded, bought and sold.

Lee Minho feels like he's going to throw up, but he has to come up with a plan, and quick.

His eyes are wide, looking to every escape route, but that won't work.

He looks to Jeongin and feels his heart pick up again as he looks back with those pretty big eyes, trusting and innocent.

"...follow hyung's instructions." He tells him, voice soft, quiet, just for them.

It's a long shot, but it's all he has.

Jeongin nods, trusting him so completely, it takes Minho's breath away. Feels his instincts of protectiveness grow immensely, deeply held.

"Alright, omega, you're next. Don't make a fuss." The alpha says, opening the door.

Minho moves quickly, then, blocking Jeongin from the alpha's view, feeling so panicked, and anxious, he's sure he'll throw up. The memory of pain is visceral, and sharp, but he does it anyway, pheromones pressed out in waves of protectiveness that makes the alpha flinch back, eyes narrowing, a confused growl on his lips.

"Y- You can't." He says, heart hammering. "H- He's not an omega. He's a beta!"

The alpha growls louder.

Minho stands his ground. "Smell him." He snarls, feeling smaller

than he presents himself right now. “He’s got a different scent, it’s not that jasmine!”

The alpha falters a little at this, eyes looking from Minho to the shaking figure behind him.

“H- He’s right. I just- I was scented by my omega mate before I left my home. T- That’s why. He was in heat!” Jeongin explains, feebly.

Minho looks to the alpha who seems slowly more convinced as he scents the air.

“If- If you sell him like this, you’ll be in trouble.” He says, voice more firm than he was expecting. “Do you really want to risk your reputation with another defective omega?”

His eyes burn, and a lump forms in his throat as he says these things, *about himself*, because he’s the defective omega. Ever since he was taken, the alphas who buy him, he never lasts long. He was never submissive like they wanted. Always fought every inch, not caring of the punishment or the pain, trying to escape. Trying to claw his way out of here.

For years, that’s what he did, and then.

And then he didn’t.

He stopped.

Became too submissive. Too old. Too ugly. Too used. Too tired of the pain.

Until now.

His hands grip Jeongin tighter behind him, eyes looking into the alpha’s gaze head on.

For years he’s heard omegas crying out to him, begging for him to help them. He never could help them. Could never help anyone. Until now. Until today. Until Jeongin.

No one, gets to touch him. Hurt him.

They'll have to go through Minho first.

"Shit." The alpha says as realization dawns. "What the fuck are those- shit. Fine."

The cage door shuts again, locking with finality, as the alpha leaves.

Minho sighs in some relief, turning to Jeongin, clutching him closer. "I- It's okay. It's okay."

They startle when the door bangs open, and three alphas enter with displeased grimaces.

"A defective omega and a beta, huh?" One of them says.

Minho immediately moves, putting himself between the alphas and Jeongin, despite the cage they're still stuck in blocking most of it.

The alpha's eyes glisten. "Hm, interesting." He says. "Fine. Fine. I'll take them both. My brothel could use... some new talent."

Minho hates the way more relief sets in, despite this death sentence, because-

Both.

He can still stay with Jeongin.

Wait. Brothel?

It hits him then, his eyes widen, panic overtaking.

But, it's too late.

The two alphas exchange money, the third smokes, watching the exchange with relief. *Not a total loss*, that gaze seems to say.

Minho's hands tighten on the pup behind him protectively, but there's not much he can do when they're moved. Quickly transferred into the back of a van, collars still on, chains tying them up nice and neat, like little presents with little bows. That's how he

felt the first time this happened, the sick twisting in his gut, the burning humiliation at the thought of it. Now, he just feels protective, and worried, and curls closer to Jeongin in the back of the van he whimpers, small and soft, and still so, *pup-like*, despite his presentation so close.

A few days, weeks, maybe even months until it hits. He can smell it under the jasmine, the citrus threatening, the mint aching to burn.

Minho's not sure what he will do then, but that's later, for now he wants to survive the night. Together.

"Welcome to your new home." The omega matron greets as she leads them through the brothel house.

It's a large modern-like mansion, with many rooms, many classy furniture. Not the kind of rundown house in the downtown of Seoul Minho was expecting. But they're led to the basement anyway, to wide array of cages, showing the ugly inside all these places hide.

"Can we- can we share?" He boldly asks, looking to the matron half-pleading, half-glaring. His scent a protective, possessive boldness of yuzu, more bitter grapefruit, than pleasant. The omega matron's nose wrinkles, but she considers them, before turning to the alpha escorting them, and nods.

Relief hits him, hard.

He'd do anything.

They're pushed into a corner cell at the end, chains finally removed, but still weighed down by the collars, Jeongin immediately clings to him, and Minho holds him protective back. Shifting them, so he has him behind him, shielding him from the alpha and omega in front of him.

She's older, forties, or fifties. Too old to service customers, but too old and too well trained to run either. To help.

Her eyes say it all.

"You start here." She explains. "If you do well, there are rooms

upstairs. No cages.”

The implication is clear.

Don’t run, do well, service well. Sit, roll over, *obey*, and then maybe you can live more decently.

It surprises Minho, but the alpha quickly sneers and says, “don’t bet on it. This one is... *defective*. And this other, a beta.”

The omega matron grimaces, but then smiles that charming grin as the alpha turns to her. “Of course, I know how to look after my charges well.”

Minho backs away, as the two disappear down the hall.

The other omegas, in the cell, come out of whatever hiding spot they were in, eyes peeking through cage bars, soft whispering filters through again.

Minho ignores them, turns to Jeongin, brings him in close, scenting him soothingly as they make their way to the corner where a pile of blankets and clothing lays.

It’s not, *their nest*, and it’s got scents that don’t belong and it’s all wrong, but it’s better than nothing. He takes it. Minho takes the reprieve, settling them down, moving things, getting it comfortable for Jeongin as best as he can.

“You must be exhausted, pup. Try to rest.” He tells him, gently, helping him to lay down, moving with him, curling around him, so his body is between Jeongin and the cage door. The wall on the other side of his pup.

Jeongin clings to him, wide eyes on him. “Don’t leave, hyung.”

Hyung.

His heart pangs.

His comes out, running gently down his hair. “Hyung won’t.” He assures. “Not going, anywhere, pup. Shh, rest, puppy, just rest,

hyung's here."

-

"no." He growls a little, feels more on edge, and feral than he ever has before. Even in his heats, forced or otherwise, he's never felt this keyed up. Instincts on haywire, inner omega clawing to come out to the surface. This protective, or murderous.

His heart pounds fiercely as the matron stares at him with an unamused glint in her eyes.

The beta guard behind her looks ready to step in any moment he needs to.

"He's- He's a beta, why would they want him?" He says, eyes averting a little, his instincts warring.

She tuts disapprovingly. "No wonder they called you defective, can't even follow simple instructions." She scoffs a little. "Fine. You want to go in his stead?"

"*hyung*." Jeongin whispers urgently from behind him, fingers curl in, tightly. "don't."

But Minhø doesn't listen, swallowing thickly, he nods. "Yes, please."

The beta snickers.

The matron smiles, a little larger, more sinister. "Only those who work get fed."

Minhø steals himself, nodding.

Her eyes look to Jeongin almost regretfully. "Fine. Let's go, omega."

He breathes a sigh of relief, and tries to untangle himself from Jeongin who doesn't want to let go at first, shaking his head, breathing rapidly.

"It's okay." He tells him. "Hyung will be back soon."

He'll hide food in his socks if he has to.

He'll make sure his pup eats, and doesn't have to suffer for it.

"I've done this a million times." He says, comfortingly.

Jeongin looks pale at the comment. Shit.

But it's too late to fix it, Minho is already being pulled away, cage door shut, separating them.

"If you want to keep protecting him," the omega matron says to him, whispering to him, eyes on the beta, as the long hall of cages to the stairs, "you'll do as I say."

He nods, quickly, agreeing easily. Relieved to have an ally.

He soon learns that's a mistake.

Because, the first customer is average, fucking Minho quickly, roughly, getting what he wants, and then it's over. But the second, snuck in by the matron who looks at him pointedly, likes things different.

Likes things that, *hurt*.

"If you want to protect him, you'll do as I say."

"Tell me how much you like the pain." The second alpha tells him, and Minho does. All his thoughts on Jeongin. His pup.

His.

-

He collapses as soon as he gets back to his cage, the door shutting with a ringing behind him. He feels Jeongin's arms encase him, a muffled, scared, "hyung!" As he goes down.

He can't feel his legs, it hurts, and it burns, and the world is spinning, but...

“Hyung got you food.” He tells him, breathless, food held out in his hands, eyes meeting Jeongin’s tear stained face.

It cuts into him, makes his omega claw upward, instincts urging him to comfort, protective, find out who dared to hurt his pup.

“Why are you crying, Innie?” His voice cracks.

Jeongin snuffles. “Why’d you do that? Why, hyung!? Why!?”

Minho holds him closer. “my pup... shh... I’ll always protect you. Let’s eat something, okay? I know your stomach won’t stop growling. It’s been a couple of days, hasn’t it?”

“F- Fine. But only if you eat something too, h- hyung.”

Minho wants to argue against it, tell him he’s gone far longer, and this portion is only meant for one. But seeing Jeongin’s tear-stained face, he relents, eating only a little.

As long as Jeongin is protected, and doesn’t have to- to do, *that*. Minho knows he can do anything.

“Eat, puppy, there you go.” He encourages, eyes fluttering shut exhaustedly.

“You t- too, hyung.”

Food is pressed to his lips, he opens them, eating it slowly. Accepting it, the intimate hand-feeding only ever done with mates. Makes his skin burn a little, even after everything.

They fall asleep after, curled in each other’s arms, lips pressed again Jeongin’s scent glands, Jeongin’s pressed against his. In a makeshift nest that’s all wrong, but for now is the only right they know.

-

This goes on for days, to weeks, and Jeongin slowly stops crying so much about it. Minho doesn’t know how to feel about that though, the way the pup’s eyes grow more blank, instead a quiet agony, and

a burning rage simmering below. But his touch to Minho is still gentle, careful, feeding him when he can't even lift his arms. Tending to his wounds as best he can, as much as Minho will let him.

The omega patron pockets the extra money from the extra client, Minho realized soon after this arrangement started. It's not just one extra client either, it's a few, her own little side business where Minho doesn't get anything, except Jeongin's safety. He'd do it again, continues to do it. Whatever it takes.

"shh... hyung, just sleep. I'll keep watch." Jeongin assures when Minho tries to keep his eyes open. "You need to rest."

He feels Jeongin's hands playing lightly with his hair, moving to rub along his arm, barely there against his bruised back, his hips.

It makes his skin grow hot, ears burning.

He didn't think he could still feel shame. Or desire.

But when Jeongin looks at him, his whole world shifts, and turns brighter.

"my pup..." He mumbles.

Jeongin leans in, kissing his lips gently, nothing passionate behind it, just a warm press of assurance, and comfort. But to Minho, it tastes like sunshine. Like love.

Jeongin's face is saddened, worried, his hands run through his hair.

"I'll take care of you, hyung, you can go under if you need to, okay?"

Oh.

Oh.

Is that what's happening?

What he can feel beginning?

Under.

Omegaspace.

Minho shakes his head against it, violently, pushing those warm floaty feelings away, making Jeongin frown. He ignores the way that presses into his chest, and says with his heart in his throat, “hyung will just nap for a bit, wake me, if they come back.” His hand tightens in Jeongin’s then, eyes firm, a commanding tone.

Jeongin doesn’t look happy with this, but nods.

“Good, pup.”

Only then, does he let himself drift, not- not, *under*, not in that, *place*. That’s far too dangerous, he’ll never do that again. But to a half-sleep state, able to wake up fully in less than a second if his pup needs him. But sleeping enough that he rests, able to go through it again. For Jeongin. His pup.

BANG.

In an instant, Minho is up.

He doesn’t know how much time has passed, doesn’t know how long he slept for, just knows enough to move in front of Jeongin, putting him behind him. Putting himself in-between Jeongin and whatever is going on upstairs.

There’s banging, and screaming, and the unmistakable sound of gunshots.

Fuck.

“h- hyung.” Jeongin says, slowly, filled with apprehension, and something else dawning. Some kind of excitement, and relief.

“Stay behind me, pup.” Minho says, heart hammering, inner omega roaring to the surface. All instincts on, *protecting*, what’s, *his*.

The sounds are coming closer, down the stairs, at the end of the hall.

All of the other omegas are up, he can hear them, cowered in the corners of their cells, wherever its safest.

Minho tries to back them both up to a corner. Instinct at an all time high. Omegan instinct, to be small, barely there, don't provoke. *Protect.*

But Jeongin's hands curl tighter, stubbornly refusing to go. "Wait, hyung." He says, excitedly, relief filling his tone, deeper emotion, like tears. "I- I recognize the scent."

It gets closer.

They do.

Minho's teeth bare, a low snarling growl escaping, violently.

Shadows in the hall, until the shadows become solid forms in front of them.

"It's okay hyung. It's my pack." Jeongin says, voice on the verge of a crying whine. "They found me."

"*Innie?*" A voice says from the darkness, filled with desperation, and an ache so fierce, it rattles Minho to his core.

Chapter 2

Notes:

your support means so much. thank you!!

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this chapter is brought to you by the lost kitten that showed up at work who we are trying desperately to catch, so that they don't freeze tonight.

Chapter Text

His heart stops, right here in his chest, refusing to beat again for the longest moment. When it does, it goes so quickly, Minho feels light-headed. The pup behind him, *Jeongin*, whines longingly for the figures in front of them. Minho feels himself trying to back up more, but Jeongin won't let him. He clings to him, almost drawing blood, like a cat who can't let go, a wolf snapping its jaws on its prey and refusing to let go. Standing his ground.

"Innie, baby, shit. Ju- Just give me a moment. I'm here, I've got you." The alpha's voice is full of timber, his scent is like musk and deep wooded expanse. It makes Minho shiver to his core as the sound of keys jangle, a struggle with the door, and then its open.

The scent tinged sweetly in anticipation, muskier in fear and apprehension as those eyes meet Minho's with wariness and uncertainty. It's a strong gaze. It's intense, and it won't let up. Minho has the urge to flinch away, bow his head, bare his neck. It's dominating, so is his scent. But Jeongin is trembling behind him, and his own hands grip him, holding him back. *Protect*, his inner omega screams. His fingers dig in. His gaze remains tightly held.

Despite the fear, his body trembling, he won't let go.

"H- Hyung." Jeongin whimpers, desperately, to the alpha. And then to Minho, lips pressed into his skin. "It's m- my alpha, hyung. *Please*. I promise, he's safe."

If he was in his right mind, not this half-feral state, he'd realize how much Jeongin is holding back. How much the alpha in front of him is. How he could rip himself out of his hold, how the alpha could tear him off- not of course without going through Minho, hurting him first- but they could. They're stronger, and the alphas always have an advantage. But neither does. Instead, Jeongin clings to him, and pleads with him to let him go.

The alpha in front, looking nervously hands held up at the entrance of the cage, but refusing to step further in.

Jeongin kisses the back of Minho's neck then, making him shiver. "*please, hyung. Trust me.*"

Minho scents the air, one last time, and feels his eyes widen as the familiar nodes of that jasmine omegan scent press in underneath it all. Not very strong, not with all the emotions the alpha is exuding through his deep scent, but it's there. It's real. It's Jeongin's omega who was in heat. Part of his pack, undeniable.

Slowly, Minho forces himself to relax. His fingers uncurl, and he feels a panic strike him when Jeongin cries, "thank you," and slips from his grasp. It feels like his heart is being torn apart, his inner omega screaming, clawing to the surface to bring their pup back. Hold him down, mark him, claim him. *His.*

It takes everything in the omega, not to move a muscle as Jeongin runs out from his grasp, *their nest*, as makeshift and terrible as it was, and runs to the alpha. He runs into his arms with a gasp, the alpha inhaling sharply, arms curling around firm and protective, and warm. Hands all over, scenting, crying, the reunion is so sweet in the air, Minho almost wants to cry himself. He doesn't. He looks down, feels the last of his humanity begin to break in him.

He's so, very grateful as it becomes apparent who this alpha is. Who the other's are lurking just beyond. Jeongin's pack. The pack Jeongin assured him would find him, would keep looking. The pack he belongs to. They've recused him, he'll be okay.

But...

Mine.

“Shh, Innie, I’m here, alpha’s here. We found you. We found you, pup.” Hands all over, the alpha, scenting Jeongin deeply. All deep wooded groves, and musk pressed along. It turns burning, like ash, and Minho feels sick from it, even as it lures him in.

But he doesn’t like alphas.

Never has.

He only likes Innie.

His inner omega claiming him, the second he saw him.

“Innie-ah.” Another voice whispers, in awe, and relief, and painful happiness. “Pup.”

“*Binnie.*” Jeongin says, sounding young, and small, moved to another body, curled in tightly pressed. Someone who is well muscled, brown hair in his eyes that look over the pup’s shoulder right into Minho’s. Almost into his soul, making him jolt, making him want to turn away, but he can’t. His gaze stays intense on Jeongin, he has to be sure. He has to protect him.

His body is still half-tense, curled to attack if need be.

But this other one, he smells like the ocean, fresh and nice, and not at all like an alpha. Not an omega either. The more neutral scent of a beta. His body at first glance screams alpha, but his scent says different, it makes Minho relax a little, to see Jeongin in his arms, but only a little.

“Hey, it’s okay.” The alpha has the audacity to say to him, leaning in a little now, eyes sympathetic and kind. He’s still too much. Still too big, and full. Filling the entire cage door in a way that makes Minho flinch back, as those eyes widen ever so slightly, scenting the air unhelped.

“Hyung, give him some room. He’s not- *please.*” Jeongin pleads, moving away from the tight hug of the beta, but still with his arms wrapped firmly around him, not letting go for a moment.

The alpha glances to Jeongin, and then back again, eyes widening even more, gulping slightly. "Sorry." He moves back, out of the way, no longer blocking. He looks sheepish, apologetic. "I wasn't thinking."

He looks genuine.

But so did so many alphas before him.

Minho's walls, and shackles climb so high, then. He feels his perfectly crafted numbness, self-control, steal over him like a shield.

The shift seems to be noticeable, the alpha's face looks perplexed, and worried, and then guilty, and a little horrified.

From further down, the rattling of cage doors is heard, before another figure presses into the array. "I opened the last door. The cops should be here soon with omega rescues services." The voice says matter-of-fact.

He looks smaller, light brown hair, and a steady gaze. Almost professional. But when his eyes land on Jeongin, a deeper emotion presses forth, and Jeongin's own eyes well up. They're in each other's arms before Minho can guess, scenting, deeply. And his scent, it's muted. But there's hints of it. Just a little. Just enough... it's all cloves and spice... and... *omegan*.

Minho's eyes widen, and he feels a protectiveness press forth. His body trembles a little, as he fights against the urge to go up to the younger omega, and shield him from this alpha, get him as far away as possible.

He's not even wearing his collar.

Fuck.

Maybe Minho can distract the alpha, make him punish himself instead.

He looks briefly to him, and sees the alpha's face tearing up at the sight of them, before turning to Minho. *Caught*. Minho tries not to move, tries not to make a sound.

The alpha looks at him, smiling gently, hands still held up non-threateningly. “Don’t worry, the omega rescue services will be here soon. They’ll find a really good place for you.”

Minho hates the sound of this, feels his inner omega rise up violently.

It must show a little in his eyes, the alpha’s body moves back, face taken aback.

Before either can say more, Jeongin half-growls, half-whines in a most animalistic desperation, “**no!**”

Everyone freezes, and Minho’s head snaps dangerously fast to his pup who’s looking at the alpha with a mixture of ferality of his own, and desperation, and something darker. More animal and human all wrapped into one. A possessive curl that has Minho feeling strangle giddy despite the tense situation, and his own fear for what the alpha will do to his pup for his defiance.

“You can’t let them. He- He took care of me, hyung. He saved me.” Jeongin’s voice cracks, and there are tears in his eyes, and Minho wants to kill the alpha.

He settles for moving quickly, stepping out of the cage even though he didn’t have permission, standing between Jeongin, and the alpha. Feeling his skin prick, and goosebumps spread. He feels in his chest.

This is it.

This is the end.

But he doesn’t care. He’s glad too, in many ways. As long as Jeongin is safe.

“Please, alpha, don’t punish him. He- He didn’t mean to defy. It- It’s my fault.” His head lowers, he feels himself trembling as he goes to bare his throat.

“Wait.” The alpha murmurs, shaking his head, expression completely confounded and agonized. Minho wonders why, briefly,

but he keeps going, until Jeongin cries out, and slips from his pack's embrace.

Suddenly, the pup is around him, holding him so tightly, so close, so desperate.

"He's mine!" Jeongin growls out, dangerously.

To his alpha.

Minho feels sick with anxiety, and fear.

This isn't just defiance.

A lack of submission.

This is a challenge. *To his alpha.*

Jeongin's scent of citrus and mint grows so strong then, so overpowering, Minho feels like he could get lost in it forever. Drown in it. Feels the heat of it, the burn, the scent growing into something more stronger, more deeper. Like rum.

Fuck.

No.

Oh, no.

He can smell it now.

The alpha scent from his pup, the overheating of his skin, the ferality in his growling.

The rut.

Jeongin is presenting. As an alpha. Challenging his pack alpha.

No. NO.

Minho whines, tries to move, tries to get between them, tries to stop this.

But Jeongin is young, and inexperienced, and won't budge.

So, desperately, with nothing else left to lose, and nowhere else to turn, Minhø looks to the other alpha.

The other alpha's eyes are wide, and just as intense on Jeongin, but he doesn't look angry. Or upset, or so full of dominance it turns to violence. Instead, he looks worried and pained. And he's nodding, as if he's agreeing.

"Shh, of course, Innie. He's yours. Of course, he can come with us. We'd never separate someone from their mate, hm? Remember when Sungie brought Seungmin home?" The alpha soothes.

Jeongin seems to hesitate, eyes flickering from his alpha to Minhø.

Minhø nods. "It's okay, pup." He finds the courage to say. "Hyung isn't going anywhere. I'm yours." He tells him, and it's truthful, and honest, and his inner omega preens when Jeongin nods, agreeing. "And you're mine." He growls, a little, possessive, filled with intent he can't deny anymore, or hide. Even though he's terribly aware of the alpha in front of them, and the audience behind them.

He reaches to his hair, runs his hand down gently, sees the way his pup's eyes flutter shut, exhaling like it's the sweetest relief.

"You're mine, aren't you, pup?" He whispers, soft.

Jeongin nods, opening his eyes, tinged in alpha red.

Minhø gulps, his own skin burning. His heart picks up, and he feels shaky with anticipation. But it's not fear. It's strange. Not to feel fear in front of an alpha, for one. But Jeongin is Jeongin. *Innie*. His pup. He could never.

"So, let's go back to your den, okay? Hyung needs to make you a proper nest for your rut, don't I?" As gentle, and as commanding as he can make it. "Hyung is hungry, baby, I want to go back with you, now." He says, a little more firm.

Jeongin's eyes widen, as he quickly nods. "I'll feed you. I'll take care of you." Looking back to the alpha now, saying quickly, "let's

go home, Chan hyung.”

Minho’s heart startles a little. *Chan?*

He risks a glance, and sees how so relieved the alpha looks, nodding in agreement. Feels it from the others too through their scents, once bitter with anxiety and fear, growing softer, nicer, with relief.

Minho looks away from their gazes then, afraid of what he’ll see when they look back. Afraid of fear, anger, and distrust. Afraid of possessiveness for their packmate, for Minho taking him away. For how Jeongin challenged his alpha over a used up, broken omega. Defective, and dirty. Afraid of something even deeper, and stupid.

Something he won’t even admit to himself.

And still, it whispers with soft-like, mocking tendrils from within, *rejection*.

-

Jeongin won’t let him go, and he’s secretly grateful for this, he doesn’t want to let Jeongin go either. Although, it does make it heart swoop when the presenting alpha picks him up, and cradles him close as soon as they get to the stairs. His other packmates close behind and in front, like a protective shield around their pup. Minho appreciates it, for Jeongin, but for himself he feels his skin burn, and guilt twist, waiting for the inevitable of the pack alpha to tear them apart. He tenses, waiting for it, skin flushed hot.

It never comes.

“Have to carry you, hyung, you’re hurt.” Jeongin whispers into his skin, whimpering a little at the notion.

Minho can feel the other’s tense, smell their anxiety as a reflection of Jeongin’s.

His heart skips. “I can walk myself.” He says low, rough.

He hates this humiliating position, because all eyes are on him. But

he can't bring himself to advocate for himself. Even if it is Jeongin.

"Yah, Innie, maybe your omega wants to walk on his own?" The quiet, reserved omega from before says.

His eyes are puffy, despite being dry from crying now, and his face has grown back a to professional calmness, exuding into his scent of spice, that makes Minho feel dizzy with it.

Jeongin tenses at his as they reach the last set of stairs. "Is that you want, hyung?"

"Please." He manages, quiet, expecting them to keep going anyway like this.

But Jeongin surprises him, they all do, he puts him down, gently, so very gently, and keeps his arm wrapped around him warm, and tight. "Better?" He says, even though his eyes are filled with worry, and an alpha haze of rut and protective possessiveness.

But to Minho, he just looks like his pup.

Something soft and gooey fills him, he reaches up, and ruffles his hair gently. "hyung is fine, you don't need to worry."

Jeongin's face doesn't look like he agrees, but he nods anyway, not letting go though, holding him close, warmly, shielding almost as they make it out of the house, past the violence, and customers, and omegas waiting for the authorities.

Minho looks away from it all, feels his heart jump as they go outside. A dull ache spreads through him as he realizes his chains are gone. Just the collar. A metal hard thing, that presses into his skin in all the wrong ways when he tries to sleep. He grips it now, tightly as he feels so naked without the chains, as Jeongin bundles him into the back of a waiting SUV. As he grabs blankets from somewhere, and wraps him up.

"You're shaking, hyung." Jeongin says, voice rough with a protective rumble.

Minho didn't even know he was shivering.

"You, too, pup." He whispers, feeling his chest tighten, as he wraps Jeongin equally.

From somewhere in the front a soft, "adorable." Is heard.

It makes Minhø tense a little, but Jeongin quickly nuzzles into his skin, scenting him, calming him, he does it back.

"Don't you want your pack?" He can't help but ask.

"They're here, hyung." Jeongin assures. "And so are you. Feels good. Feels complete." He mumbles in a haze of headspace that's all alpha, less human. "Now that you're here. With us."

Minhø gulps, lets his pup cling to him, eyes sneaking glances to the alpha, beta, and omega in the front seats.

Jeongin said there was seven including himself.

Where are the other three?

And why is an omega with them on such a dangerous run?

He's not even wearing a collar.

Minhø sucks in a breath, tensing all over.

Jeongin whines, sensing the shift.

"It's okay." He assures. "Hyung's fine. You're okay." Hand petting at his hair, forcing himself to relax.

It doesn't take long at all before they make it to wherever they're going. He assumes it's Jeongin's place, his pack's place. But he's not sure. Just knows that when they get there, Jeongin's face turns relieve, and anxious with anticipation, and deep emotion all at once. He's practically bouncing to get out, coming back to himself a little, pre-rut holding back a little.

"It's okay, you can go in first." Minhø assures Jeongin who looks anxious, and uncertain. Eyes from himself to the front entrance where presumably all his other pack mates wait on the other side.

“I’m okay, pup, go see.”

Jeongin glances at him deeply, and then surprising him, making his heart jump, leans in to slot their lips together in gentle kiss. It’s full of promise, and comfort, and Minhø bites back a moan, he can’t deny. Feels his skin flush as Jeongin practically jumps from the car then, as the others in the vehicle inhale a sharp breath. As the pack alpha, quickly follows after Jeongin, albeit a little startled.

Left alone, Minhø can’t help but feel his ears burn hot, fear overtaking him. *what will they say?* Jeongin shouldn’t have kissed him.

Not in front of them.

They wouldn’t understand.

He’s encroaching on their territory.

He feels sick.

“...you both got very close.” The beta says, gently with surprise. “I’ve never seen Innio get that close with someone so quickly.”

Minhø looks up, eyes ducking down even as he does so. Letting them know he’s listening, paying attention, but not letting his eyes up directly, being a submissive omega.

“S- Sorry.” He feels the need to say.

The scent of cloves turns bitter in confusion and annoyance. “Don’t.” The other omega says, and then exits the vehicle too.

“Aish, where are my manners?” The beta continues the conversation, now that it’s just the two of them, even if the doors are open.

It makes Minhø’s skin prickle, body tensing, waiting for the inevitable to come.

“I’m Changbin.” The beta introduces. “That was Seungmin, and out pack alpha, Bang Chan.”

Minho doesn't move an inch, breath held tightly in his chest, heart thumping wildly. He waits for the pain.

Changbin nods, to himself. "Shall we go in? Our other packmates are inside. Hyunjin, Jisung, and Felix."

Minho hesitates, only a little, beta or not, he's still higher up in hierarchy, and this was no doubt an order disguised as a question. He had a few owners like that, before these ones. He understands the cruel undertone, the knife that feels like a walking path until it turns and slices.

He nods, moves out, after the beta. Following closely behind.

He sees the way Changbin looks back, confusion in his eyes, something he wants to say, but he stops himself, even if Minho tenses himself, waiting for it.

He's only scared he won't be able to stand still, not fall over. He hurts. All over, right now. The matron was relentless, and he didn't food for them, for his pup. Every step is like agony. He doesn't want to fall over. He can take it.

He doesn't want to be sent back.

Needs to stay with Jeongin. With Innie. *His pup.*

But the blows never come, instead, the beta holds the door open for him, making him confused and apprehensive of what waits, but no hurt comes. Instead, he stares inside at this big house, impressive, and out of the way, he realizes too late. Sees the woods surrounding. Feels himself grow a little numb, and cold.

But when he comes inside, the place makes his eyes widen.

It's modern, but warm. It feels... lived in. Despite its size. The artwork, the furniture, the items, all colorful and full of life.

And in the middle of the entrance hall, is his pup's pack.

All crowded around him, tears in their eyes, scent thickly held, all blending together into a special new scent. A scent of pack.

The kind he's never scented before, felt before.

It's all over, everywhere, and so- so warm. Something thick fills him like syrup, burning in the back of his throat as he hears laughter, relived, and loving. And complete.

"It's all because of hyung." Innies says, and then all eyes turn to Minho, making him gulp, thickly as seven pairs reach him.

The gazes feel heavy, they feel like some darker liquid burning on his skin. He feels it pushing him down, feels his knees buckle. Feels them hit the ground, *hard*. His instincts roaring to life, inner omega weakly clawing. His head tilts back, throat baring.

Submitting.

There are gasps, intakes of breath, and a pained sound from two omegas. Then three.

Minho feels sick and dizzy with that information, but his mind is a haze, and he needs to do this.

Let them punish him, not Jeongin. Not his Innies. Not his pup.

"Hyung, *no!*" Jeongin yells, coming to him quickly, slipping out of another's grasp.

Minho wants to tell yell at him not to come closer. That it's not safe, that he's doing this to protect him. But he can't get the words out, his jaw feels locked tight. He's still, and unable to move, and all he can do is stare down at the tiled floor, and feels nothing.

Until, Jeongin's warm heated hands encase his cold skin, moving all over him, making his heart jolt alive again. Makes him feel hot head to toe, able to move a little, look up. Feels his eyes widen as he takes in Jeongin, in front of him, *kneeling*, too.

No.

This is wrong.

Alpha's don't kneel.

"It's okay, hyung. Shh, it's okay. You don't have to do that here." Jeongin assures, gently, comfortingly, hands all over, scenting with his wrist. Where his secondary scent glands are. Filling Minhø with his ripening rum scent, as rut keeps fighting within to take over. A hand reaches to the back of his neck. Minhø tenses, body so tight like a livewire, but Jeongin doesn't squeeze, just rests there, tenderly, rubbing his thumb soothingly along. When Minhø is aware enough to flinch, he quickly moves his hand away, face looking so very sad. But he shouldn't look sad, his pup should never look sad.

"It's okay, hyung, you're such a good omega for me. I'll take care of you." Jeongin tells him, voice thickly held, filled with possessive promise.

Heat burns low in Minhø's gut, as someone from faraway says, "Innie, no."

Jeongin growls at this.

Minhø feels himself agreeing, nodding silently.

If his pup wants him, he can have him.

Minhø doesn't really want to... but he can do it. And for Innie, for his pup, it might not even be so bad.

He can smell the rut intensifying, see the alphan haze in Jeongin's eyes taking over.

He feels himself beginning to slick.

It's overheated, lost in their own world, until-

His pup is snatched away from him, and Minhø snarls.

He reaches for Jeongin who reaches back, but he knows better than to move from his spot.

When the pack alpha's eyes meet his, Minhø's own noises die in his throat.

They stare at one another, and Minho's never hated anyone more.

"It's okay, omega." A new voice next to him says, gentle and soft, and all omegan.

The scent of lavender fills him, and Minho feels it burning out the heady rum, and mint. And Jeongin.

He stares at his pup struggling, watches as the pack alpha and another alpha, with the beta Changbin talking to him in low hushed voices.

"Do you really want him like this?" Of course, why would Innie want him like this, used up and broken, why would he want him at all? "Does he even want this?" The pack alpha tells him.

"He's traumatized, pup." Changbin says.

The other alpha, holding Jeongin close and tenderly, comforting him the way Minho knows it should be himself comforting him, telling him, "shh, it's okay, pup. Felix has set up a nice nest for you, hm? Want to go see? Minnie and Sungie will take care of your omega, okay? Just them, I promise."

That hurts the most. He promised his pup, he'd make a nest for him, for them. But-

Of course.

He's nothing.

This is Jeongin's pack, not him.

Jeongin looks to Minho then, a silent question in his eyes.

Everyone looks between them, shock and surprise, and wonder.

Minho feels dread fill him, but he doesn't let it show.

The pack alpha clearly wants this, and the last thing Minho wants, is for Jeongin to be hurt. He'll protect him no matter what.

He nods, once, decisively, despite the cost to himself. The agonizing slice through his own chest, a *pull*, urging him to take it back, and move towards Jeongin so tight, it's hard to breathe.

Jeongin melts at the silent command, looking down, pouting, eyes filling with tears as his rut begins to tear through.

The others take Jeongin away, and soon it's a little more silent, calmer. The scents are muting, less intense. It helps to cut through the haze of his own state.

Minho doesn't even realize that the two omegas are left behind with him, until the soft sound of humming filters through. Realizing as the haze recedes, that it's happening for a while. That the soft, comforting sound has been going on a while.

"Hey." A new voice says, when he realizes Minho has turned to him. Soft sweet eyes, and cute face stares back at him. The sweetest face Minho has ever seen next to Jeongin's. Next to the other omega... *Seungmin*? "There you are, omega hyung."

From the other side of him, he can still smell cloves, and a soft press of laughter. "I'm sure he has a name, Sungie."

Sungie, pouts. "I know, Seungmin-ah, but he hasn't told us yet."

Seungmin rolls his eyes, then notices Minho watching him, and his skin turns a soft pink.

Minho feels a little drunk on their scents. And their presence.

Lavender and cloves, and knows without a doubt, as he stares at these omegas, that they're, *his*, too. A possessive curl, a claim deeper than logic or reason, fits quickly into perfect place.

He breathes shakily. "Minho." He tells them. "My name is Lee Minho, pups."

Mine, his inner omega screams, possessive and filled with intent, fingers curling, aching to bring them close.

Chapter 3

Notes:

ahh!! new chapter. my favourite so far. <3 enjoy!!

Chapter Text

“Can I call you hyung?” The lavender scented omega is so careful, so sweet. He doesn’t touch him, but Minho can tell he wants to. His pretty eyes look him over, finding his features, worried, unsure.

Minho feels his inner omega purring, desperate to claw out, protect, and comfort. Wrap him up in his arms, in his scent, nip at his throat until he’s more calm. More at ease. Drag him into his nest, and never let him out.

If he had one, he mourns the loss, carefully hidden, somewhere deep within.

He nods in answer.

The omega smiles, radiantly, shyly. “I’m Jisung, hyung. This is Seungmin. We’re Innie’s packmates.”

He nods again, he remembers. His head turns a little, looking to the other omega on his other side, sees the way Seungmin is studying him with a more clear-headed expression. More serene, and unperturbed. “Would you like to have a bath, and get changed into some clean clothing, hyung?”

He has the urge to ask if that’s a trick question, but this is a pretty common order when he first arrives at his new owner’s den. They never like the old scents that cling to him from auction houses, or previous owners. They like him to become a blank slate, something that can be moulded into however they want him. Alphas in particular love dumping their scent on him, bathing him in it until he’s choking on it. A clear satisfaction at claiming their property. Now, wouldn’t be any different, still he feels a slight twinge of disappointment, which startles him. He hasn’t felt anything like this

in years.

“Hyung?” Jisung prompts, voice gentle, quiet.

Usually his owners only had him, no other omegas, but in the rare instance he was cleaned up, often it was by other servants. Usually betas, but omegas too. Not wanting the alpha’s property to be tainted before they have a chance.

Minho can’t help it, his eyes turn up the staircase where the other’s disappeared. Where Jeongin did, his pup. His heart spasms in worry, his inner omega clawing forward, urging him at all costs to go up there. Find him, help him. *Innie*.

But, he can’t.

He holds himself back.

Because that alpha told him to, and he’s the pack alpha, in charge. Head alpha to the extreme. He made his lower alpha in first rut obey him. This is not a simple thing. Minho feels light-headed at the thought, a trembling fear grips him. He doesn’t want to get Jeongin in more trouble, and he doesn’t want his omegas here to get into any trouble either. He’ll follow along, get cleaned and changed, and be presentable for the pack alpha.

If he can make himself more delectable, the pack alpha will get bored of the others, he’ll only take him.

And then maybe, he can see Jeongin again.

“Okay, Jisung-ah.” He says, nodding his head, bowing a little.

He can see the omega frown at this, hands reaching out, too fast, making Minho flinches.

Just a little, barely anything, but enough for the omega to freeze, eyes widening. He looks anxious again, so much in his eyes, it makes Minho feel so, so guilty. His heart twists, he wants to reach back. Scent him thoroughly, shush him into his nest, calm him.

Seungmin beats him to it, scent exuding, calming. “It’s okay

Sungie. Hyung, can you walk upstairs yourself?”

Minho nods quickly, still looking at Jisung. “I can. Hyung can.” He assures more firmly. Wanting to say more, but the words are hard. Feels like an invisible wall has made its way over his words reaching his mouth.

Thankfully, Jisung looks up, seemingly appeased, nodding, some of the anxiety melting away. “Okay, I didn’t meant t- to scare you, hyung.”

He shakes his head, against such a thing. How could he? And even if he did, it’s his right.

But, it’s difficult, he realizes as he gets up to follow them, legs like jelly, shaky all over. Because these two omegas are clearly apart of the pack, if not the scents clinging to them, the markings hiding slightly by their shirts, but still there, clear as day. But also by the words, the reassurances of from everyone in conversation, that they are. And yet, neither omega wears a collar.

Minho feels strange then, feels the weight of his own metal own extremely. Feels the painful press of it as he gets up, as he moves, as it rubs against the old wounds, outward, and inward.

It takes everything to get up the stairs, to climb them. His head rushes with blood, heart pounding, a haze stripped from him so coldly. But he ignores it, focuses on one foot in front of the other instead of the black dots swimming in his vision. Focuses on spice, and lavender, and the stairs he clings to the rail to help him get up.

“Your room will be next to ours, hyung, okay?” Jisung says, carefully. “It’s... a little further away, but you’ll love it, I promise. You have your own bathroom, and if you need anything, you can knock on me or Minnie’s door, or Felix if he’s in his room.”

A beat of silence as he struggles up the last step, and then Seungmin’s voice, a little uncomfortable, but certain, “we’re all omegas. You don’t have to worry.”

Minho looks to the younger omega, sees the way Seungmin looks

back with a knowing gaze. A strong one, it makes Minho shiver a little. How can he be so brazen? So bold?

“But, for the record, your secondary gender doesn’t mean much here.” Seungmin continues. “Not if you don’t want it to.”

What an odd thing to say, to put it mildly.

They stare at one another then, for a while, Minho’s not sure for what, just knows he can’t back down. Doesn’t want to. He feels a little frozen, a little stuck, but then Suengmin huffs a noise, and looks away first.

Jisung breaks the silence. “This way, Minho-hyung.”

He blinks, turns and follows the other omega into a room at the end of the hall.

His heart strangles in his chest a little as he takes in the large bedroom. The furniture is plain. A white bed. Neutral browns and greys, a desk, some shelves, a dresser. Another door leading into a clear bathroom. The only touch of color is a little green, a gentle green, like the algae that used to be on his father’s boat.

“It’s a spare room, for when some of our kin visits, so there’s not much here. But we can decorate it more to your liking, later, I’ll help. Anything you don’t like, hyung, we’ll change.” Jisung assures.

Minho feels a little more dizzy at the implication, he looks to the omegas with uncertainty. “I... My room?” Confused, even.

His eyes scan it again, sees the large closet in the corner, the bathroom not connected to any other room. The large tub inside, the shower, the vanity and sink. The toilet in the corner. Everything looks clean, pristine. A little expensive. Too nice for him.

He feels a burning in his throat, and pushes it away.

Some owners want their omegas away from everyone else. Want them exclusively, but- this is different. This is close to the other omegas, which isn’t that strange. But it’s big, too comfortable, and nice.

Oh.

Maybe the alpha comes, *here*, instead of the other way around.

Oh, that makes more sense. Some alphas, with multiple omegas are like this.

Minho shivers again at the thought.

“Are you cold, hyung? How about a bath? I’ll run it for you.” Jisung disappears into the bathroom, and in the next moment, Minho hears the sound of running water.

“There are clothes in the dresser, all neutrally scented.” Seungmin explains, startling him only a little. So lost in his head, he forgot he was behind him. “Sorry.” The other omega says, noticing. “As for your... injuries. I’m supposed to ask if you need a doctor.”

A strike of cold harsh fear spreads through him, eyes widening, as he remembers hands. Fingers. Cold instruments.

“be good omega.”

A cold sweat breaks out.

Seungmin notices, nodding, taking it all in stride, eyes a little wider too, turning angrier. But then he looks away, breathes once, and looks back. Getting a hold of himself, not looking so angry anymore. It makes Minho untense just a little, for a moment there, he thought his only allies in this place- *his omegas*, his pups, were angry with him.

“You don’t have to see a doctor if you don’t want to.” Seungmin tells him, with a tone of authority that catches Minho off-guard.

He watches the other omega, a little more warily.

“What I mean is, Sungie is a nurse. He can look you over if you’re more comfortable?”

It’s confusing.

But then he thinks that the alpha must want him in perfect condition, so he relaxes a little, nodding in understanding of what's about to happen.

Seungmin looks a little relieved. "Good. Sungie!"

Jisung appears almost instantly. "Yes, Minnie-ah?"

Seungmin flushes a little at the nickname, but otherwise doesn't show its effects. "Can you look over, hyung? Medically? He doesn't want to see a doctor."

Jisung's face does something funny. "Our hyungs aren't going to like that."

"So what!?" Seungmin snaps. "Hyung's made his choice."

Minhos feels, strangely touched, and worried for the other omega.

He doesn't want them fighting, but when looking between them, Jisung doesn't seem perturbed by this at all, just smiles. "Aww, Minnie, our little protector." Trying to ruffle his hair.

Seungmin dodges him. "Stop it. Hyung needs your attention more right now."

Jisung quickly turns to him, nodding. "Want to step inside the bathroom? Seungmin, can you get the first aid kit?"

"There should be one in the bathroom."

"Ah, right. Well, hyung, please, step inside my office."

Minho nods, a little hesitantly, but follows.

Anxiety grips him as soon as the door shuts, and it's just the two of them, and the running water. He looks to the door, feels his heart jump when he notices a lock on it, from the inside. Huh.

"Would you like to lock the door, hyung?" Jisung asks, gently, noticing him looking at it, as he reaches for the first aid kit under the sink.

Minho looks back, confused, uncertain. Apprehensively, he asks, "...can I?"

Jisung looks sad and angry for a moment, before he smiles, nodding as kind as ever. "Of course."

"Alpha won't get mad?" He has to be sure.

Jisung's face does something funny. "No. And even if he did, Suengmin would kill him first for such disrespect, okay?"

Fear grips him, a protective surge strong and all-encompassing fills him. "No." He growls, so very gently. "I won't let that happen to him, I promise, pup."

Jisung's eyes widen, blinking a little.

His teasing dies down a little, walking slowly over, he tells him so very gently, "I was only kidding, hyung, I'm sorry. That won't happen. I'll lock it, okay? If that's what you want?"

He feels stuck, watching a little anxiously as Jisung does so. His own scent turns a little soured, but he tries his best to take deep breathes, and let his scent of yuzu even out into something pleasant, which seems to make Jisung smile, and sigh, dreamily. "You smell really good, hyung."

His inner omega purrs silently, pleased.

"Can I look at your injuries now?" Jisung asks carefully. "When you're ready, okay?"

Minho feels deep uncertainty, apprehension, a little fear, looking into his omega's eyes, glancing briefly to the locked door, and the scent of slight powder from the bubbles emanating from the bath flowing with steam, he feels a little less of it. A little more okay to do this.

He takes off the slip.

He's not wearing underwear, and feels his skin prickle in shame.

He tries to push back the urge to cover himself, uncertain why after so many years such an urge has appeared. He's no one, nothing, just another omega whore.

But Jisung doesn't look down, his cheeks redden. "You can cover yourself a little."

So, Minho does, wrapping the slip over his lower area, his own skin heating at Jisung's slight embarrassment. Watches as the omega, then looks at him, *really* looks. Sees the way his face falls, and his eyes begin to fill with tears.

Minho wonders briefly how he can be a nurse, if he can cry over such small injuries.

It doesn't take long, some more blushing, and hands that work clinically over the worst of them, before Jisung tells him he can step into the bath. That he'll finish when he's done. Minho nods, and waits for Jisung to leave the bathroom.

He wants to lock the door again, but he hesitates.

It might be a trick, he might get in trouble. Or worse, get the other omegas into trouble. His heart sinks, and he wars within himself, before he gives up. Like always, and leaves it unlocked, slipping into the bath. The hot water is so, so good. He audibly gasps in the feeling, feels it croak down his throat, tears in his eyes.

It's been years.

"How is he?" A voice murmurs through the wall near his head.

Minho's entire body freezes.

He strains to hear more.

It's a little distant, faraway, but it echoes into the bedroom, that much is certain.

"He'll heal." Seungmin says stiffly.

"Jisung?" The voice continues, firmly.

“He will, hyung.” Jisung tells him, but his voice breaks a little.

The other voice is silent for a moment, as Minho tries to understand the familiarity of it. Where he’s heard it. Why it makes all his instincts go still, as if waiting for something.

“The doctor can see him now, or after Innies.”

“No.” Seungmin’s voice is sharp.

“No?” The voice continues. “He needs to see a doctor, Seungmin-ah.”

“He doesn’t want to.” Seungmin insists. “So, he won’t. Jisung-hyung already looked him over. He’ll be okay. We’ll take care of him.”

A soft sigh. “Seungmin, he’s been in that place for who knows how long, he needs proper medical care.”

“Jisung is proper medical care, and besides, it’s Minho-hyung’s choice.”

Minho feels his breath steal, panic presses into his sternum, heart rate going crazy. What is his omega doing? His pup? Is he crazy!?

There’s no way this is another omega he’s talking to.

Fear, real cold, and horrible fills Minho then.

“He needs-”

“He can make his own choices, *alpha*, he’s not a child.”

Minho is seconds away from launching himself out of the bathtub, and running in-between Seungmin and what he recognizes now is the pack alpha’s voice. Going to his knees, *submitting*, begging for him to give him Seungmin’s punishment on his behalf. He waits for the inevitable whimper of pain, for the hurt, fingers curling in the tub, about to run. To protect.

But, it doesn’t come.

Just, silence.

“Jisung-ah?” The pack alpha defers. *Defers.*

Minho feels sick. And so, very confused.

“They’re not great injuries, hyung, but it’s nothing I can’t handle. At least, physically.” Jisung explains, carefully.

“How is Innie?” Seungmin changes the subject, voice thick with concern.

The pack alpha sighs, softly, chuckling a little weakly. “He’s perfect. Amazing. He just... he won’t stop asking for him.”

Minho feels his heart startle. *‘Him’?*

Is he talking about himself?

Does his pup...? His Innie...?

Minho’s inner omega rallies, and it takes him biting onto the inside of his cheek, hard, to stop himself.

“They’ve really bonded.” The pack alpha continues, almost wistfully. “Almost as if...”

“They’ve claimed each other, without the actual physical act?” Seungmin confirms.

“Mm.” The pack alpha hums. “I should get back to him. And, Minho...?”

His heart falters at the sound of his own name, from the lips of the pack alpha. *Chan.* He feels a strange thing crawl over him. Feels his fingers moving to the metal collar still trapped around his neck, digging into it. Anchoring himself.

It hurts.

It helps.

“The key for that disgusting thing around his neck, would really

help, hyung.” Seungmin deadpans, voice filled with something unbridled.

“Right, sorry. Here.” Chan shuffles.

Minho feels his heart drop into his stomach, as the last of his barely there, stupid hope evaporates. The pack alpha has the key to his collar, which can only mean one thing. And here, for a second, he really thought, that maybe, just maybe, that Innies, maybe his pack- that they were different. And they are, of course, the omegas- but not the alpha. The pack alpha. This much is clear.

He has the key to his collar.

His owner.

Minho feels light-headed, hears the door shut, feels himself sinking further into the water. All the way in, down below, until the water is going into his ears, trying to get up his nose, down his throat, completely covered. Hot water, and soap, eyes shut. The sound of the world muffled from his perspective underwater.

If he stays under long enough, he could drown.

It could be over.

At the auction houses, with his owners, there was no way out. Even these little escapes were forbidden by increased monitoring technology, and carefully given utensils. This is the first time, where Minho finds himself, so readily able to use one.

And for a moment, he really wants to, a little too desperately. Thinks of just, *stopping*. There’s a quiet, bone-deep relief in that.

Body stopping, the pain drifting away, himself, drifting away. The only way to really stop it.

But then, he thinks of Innies. His pup.

He thinks of the omegas outside, what would happen if he did something like that on their watch.

He thinks of Innie, desperately struggling to get to him. Thinks of his scent, thinks of him in his arms, lips pressed against his throat. His arms ache for him, his omega does, every part.

Minho sits up, out of the water, gasping for air.

A pounding on the door startles him, an urgent voice asking, “Minho-hyung? Are you alright!? Minho!”

He gasps. “I- I’m fine!” He calls back, coughing.

“Please, let us in.” Jisung, pleads.

Minho looks to the unlocked door, and feels something shift within him. “Okay.” He calls, soft.

The door opens immediately, and the two omegas rush in, staring at him with wide eyed concern. Seungmin looks down to all the water splashed around, and Minho immediately feels guilty.

“Sorry, all the heat, I got dizzy, I dozed off. I’m sorry.” His heart hammers, as he lies.

They shake of his apologies, Jisung coming to help him out, to treat the rest of his wounds. But Seungmin’s eyes stay too long on the water on the floor, a deeper look in his eyes when they meet his. Almost knowing.

This time, Minho has to look away first.

-

When he’s dry, and clean, in new clothing that completely covers him, all soft and loose, and nice. So very, nice. He’s never had clothing like this in years. Soft grey sweatpants, and a loose white shirt. Even underwear, and socks, large fuzzy. It doesn’t smell like anything really, and it’s so jarring that he flinches a little at the silence of it all, before Minho finds himself sinking deeper into the feeling. Tears in his throat at how, *good*, it feels.

But it doesn’t last, not when Jisung sits next to him on the bed, and Seungmin stands before him, telling him, “let’s get that thing off

you now, okay, hyung?”

He's holding the key, but he holds it out to him, making Minho's head dizzy with the thought of taking off his own collar.

The alpha is supposed to do that, his owner.

No one else is allowed to.

Seungmin's eyes grow confused, hurt, and then his jaw tenses in anger. “I have our pack alpha's permission.” He says, but he says it like the words are glass being grounding between his teeth.

It makes Minho a little confused, but he relaxes. He remembers the conversation he overheard, and the pack alpha did it give it over, and did not argue with Seungmin's assertions of removing it.

He must have gave him a new collar too, for him.

Even if these other omegas don't wear one, maybe there is a more intense hierarchy here, within the omegas, too.

He just hopes, the collar isn't filled with spikes, or electricity.

He nods shakily, and bares his throat a little, not enough of full submission, but enough to make Jisung gasp, and Seungmin look like he wants to cry, or punch something. It makes Minho confused, and sorry. He's just not sure what for, exactly.

Seungmin doesn't hesitate a moment longer though, he leans in with he key, and presses inside.

The collar snaps open, and Minho can breathe.

His head goes all light as blood rushes, and his vision becomes a haze.

“Shh, it's okay, omega-hyung, it's okay. You're doing so well, just take deep breaths, okay?” Jisung says, sweetly, lavender enveloping Minho then, making it bearable.

The scent of cloves fills him too.

He waits for the other collar. *Their* collar, but it never comes.

His face scrunches up, confused.

He looks to Seungmin, uncertain.

“What is it, hyung?” Seungmin asks, just as uncertain, and worried.

“Aren’t you...” He gulps. “...going to put another one on? *Yours?*”

Seungmin’s jaw tenses, and Jisung’s scent falters a little.

“We don’t wear collars in this den, in this pack, unless we want to.” Seungmin explains, stiffly. “Even then, it’s usually only in omegaspace.” He looks a little uncomfortable at this, but doesn’t back down.

It makes Minho so very confused, and empty.

His hand reaches up, clutching at his throat, as he feels panic filling him, beginning to claw at it. It was just anxiety before, now he really can’t breathe. His throat is bare, he- he can’t-

“Hey, hey it’s okay, hyung. What’s wrong, hm? Everything’s okay. You’re safe.” Jisung says, gently, not touching him, careful, but his scent becomes stronger, calming pheromones of lavender.

Minho is drunk on it, but it can only dull the panic so much.

“I- I need- I need my co- collar back. I-” He reaches for it, but Seungmin holds it out of reach, leaving a whine, guttural and low and omegan distress slip out.

The two omegas flinch, painfully at the sound, as it rattles him to his core.

“*Minnie.*” Jisung says, urgently. “Please, he needs- he wants one.”

Seungmin’s jaw clenches, but he nods, once, even if he looks unhappy about it. “Fine. I will get you a collar, hyung. J- Just wait.”

The words calm him somewhat, but the panic still seizes, and grips

his lungs in a vice-like hold. He clutches at his chest, at his throat, as Jisung hums softly, emanating his scent. It ends up only being a few moments, but it feels like a life time, before Seungmin is back, and *kneels*, in front of him. It makes Minho's eyes widen, as Seungmin looks at him carefully.

"You can use one of mine." He tells him, cheeks dusting red. "But if you can take it off, whenever you need to, hyung."

Take it off?

Whenever he wants?

Minho's mind is all dizzy, he can't make sense of it.

But quick, warm fingers loop a simple black collar around his neck, snapping into place, and suddenly everything is clear. And he can breathe easier.

Can smell the deep clove and spice, see Seungmin up close, right in front of him as he adjusts it so loose, it could almost be a necklace. Sees Seungmin right in front of him, can count his eyelashes, see the prettiness of his features up close.

His fingers rub along his skin as he fixes the collar for the last time, sending warmth, and sparks throughout Minho he can't fight. Skin heating, goosebumps expanding. His cheeks warm.

"Better, hyung?" Seungmin asks so tenderly, their eyes locking, a tension heated between.

Minho gulps, and nods. "Mm." He agrees, as the tension thickens. "Better."

A knock at the door, startles them both.

Minho flinches, and Seungmin looks annoyed as he turns to stare the door.

"What?" He snaps.

Minho flinches a little at the tone, but Jisung shushes him, and

Seungmin looks briefly to him apologetically. But his announce persists as he turns back to the door, glaring at it as if it personally offended him. Or at least, the person on the other side.

Said person doesn't even open the door, just says sheepishly through the wood, "I'm sorry? Uh... Innie, he's not doing so well. He really- he keeps asking for Minho. Would it be possible if he came?"

Minho's heart startles at his words, recognizing the voice quickly. The beta, Changbin.

Seungmin turns to him then, eyes calculating him worriedly. "Do you feel up to it, hyung? Nothing will happen to you, if you want to. I won't let him lose control, none of us will."

Minho feels a pang in his chest at the mention of his pup, of Jeongin, feels it ache like tendrils into his whole body, his whole being. There's nothing more that he wants than to see him, and he's nodding quickly before the words of Seungmin's can register. And when they do, he feels strangely warm, if not confused.

Alphas are notoriously feral during rut, even more so during their first presentation.

What could anyone do to stop him?

Why would they want to?

And why does Suengmin seem to think that Minho would want Jeongin too?

"You don't have to." Seungmin tells him, a little gentler, leaning in, eyes firm. "He'll be fine without us."

Minho shakes his head against it, quickly, feels his skin rush with blood. "I- I want to."

"Mm. Okay. But you need to eat something first, okay?"

Seungmin frames it like a question, staring at him, as if waiting for an answer.

It's very confusing, especially when Minho wants for Seungmin to mean it so badly. To be a question, where any answer could be acceptable. Instead of the orders these questions so clearly are, disguised, for false security. A test, maybe. But he always passes them now.

He nods, once, decisively.

"Please." He finds the courage to say, heart tight in his chest, *pull*, tugging painfully. "Just let me see him."

Chapter 4

Notes:

this chapter is brought you by my 2 large cups of
coffee i had today. :))
enjoy!!

Chapter Text

They make him eat. It's simple food, a rice porridge that's more like a soup. Seungmin asks him if he likes salty or sweet better, and he doesn't know how to answer him. It makes the other omega sad, eyes downcast, and an angry clench of his jaw. But Jisung assures him everything is fine, and then he's given a sweet rice porridge instead. It's put into his hands carefully, and both omegas stare at him for a moment too long, before they lapse into an easy conversation about work.

"The patients are great in my new ward. I mean, obviously, patients are always difficult, but here I feel like I'm doing the best work I can. The ER was very chaotic at times." Jisung explains.

Minho scrapes at his bowl, puts the food on his tongue, swallows slow, deliberate.

His stomach tightens painfully, but he can't see Jeongin if he doesn't eat.

Seungmin hums. "I understand. My internship was supposed to be at that smaller law firm, but I'd rather work corporate for a while, just so I can understand their power structures better. They're the most notorious for undermining omegas in the field."

Minho's head perks up a little at this, can feel it in his chest, a tug of curiosity, and confusion. It sounds like he's talking about lawyers. As if this omega with a pack, and an alpha- *an owner*- goes out and works too. It's... interesting. Perturbed. It seems as if these omegas are different from him, although he already kind of knew

that.

He forces another spoonful of food.

“Are you...?” He stops himself, when two pairs of eyes look at him.

His skin burns under the intensity of all the attention, looking down into his porridge. “Sorry.”

Seungmin sucks in a breath, and then lets it down slow, long, and very deliberate. “Please, hyung, don’t apologize, just ask. I prefer direct communication.”

He nods, understanding this all too well. He hates when people skirt around what they’re trying to say too. Hates it even more when the alpha says something but means something else, and he can’t quite wrap his head around it. And then he does it wrong, or answers wrong, and it just- it hurts. It’s terrifying. Every move is wrong. Nothing is certain.

“Are you some kind of legal secretary?” He asks, carefully, looking up.

Seungmin’s face does something funny, before he’s smiling, a little wryly. “I get that a lot. But no. I just graduated from law school. I’m in my internship year. I’ve moved a couple of times, because I want to get a feel for different fields, and also asshole alphas who think I’m just a secretary, even when I point out my law degree.”

He says it angrily, a flush to his cheeks.

Minho feels an immediate overpowering urge to shield him, to growl, to find whoever made Suengmin so upset, *pay*. Put those alphas into their place.

“Ah... Minho-hyung?” Jisung says, quietly, uncertain.

Minho breathes, realizes he’s been gripping Seungmin’s arm a little too tightly. Uncertain when he ever started touching him at all.

“Sorry.”

Seungmin's face flickers with confusion. "I don't mind. But, are you okay, hyung?"

"Yeah." He says, embarrassed at his reaction, scooping up some more food. He needs to hurry, his pup is waiting for him. And he needs to stop himself from doing something even more dumb, like telling Seungmin if he has anymore problems with alphas, to come to him. His inner omega practically feral with the thought of it, of his Seungmin, *his omega*, out there in that world. Put down, hurt, looked down upon, put into place.

"Do you want some more?" Jisung asks, hopeful.

Minho looks up then, uncertain. Is this a trick question again?

His stomach tightens, cramping at the thought of even another spoonful.

He wants to look to Seungmin, try to gauge his reaction, but he feels strangely uncertain about that too.

"It's okay, hyung, you don't have to." Seungmin assures, taking the bowl gently from his hands. "Do you want to go see Innies, now?"

His head whips around at the mention of Jeongin, his pup, the tug painful in his chest as he nods. "*please.*"

Finally.

He needs to see him, be with him, scent him, hold him close in his n-

Make sure he's okay.

His pup asked for him, and there isn't a world where Minho wouldn't go to him.

"Let's go together, okay, hyung?" Jisung says, smiling, soft lavender notes filling in the room. A calming, peaceful scent, the pheromones a little targeted to do so. But Minho doesn't mind, it soothes some of his own anxiety. His Yuzu scent curling a little around the omega's. Like a protective shield of scenting he can't

help.

Jisung smiles a little, eyes showing how he feels it, even Seungmin looks a little surprised, but leaning into it a little. Something in his straight shoulders, and firm rigid hold, relaxing just a little. Minho can't help the way his inner omega whines, almost gratefully at the sight. Like, *finally*, he did something right.

"Okay." He agrees, when he realizes they're waiting for him to say something.

They go first, out the door of his room, himself following closely behind, head down, heart in his throat. He knows the proper procedure when next to his owner, his alpha, and anyone else in the pack, despite the confusion of it all. Of the place of these omegas. Of how they work, and clearly have some authority with how they're treating him. He hangs back a little, lets the more experienced omegas here lead, until they come to a door, and knock gently.

There are voices inside murmured, slow and soothing, and a scent that is overpowering emanating from underneath the crack in the door. It makes something twist inside, and his inner omega clawing at the surface so violently, Minho has to take a deep breath to stop himself.

"*come in.*" A voice calls from inside.

It doesn't take long before the door is opened, and Minho is hit with the full force of minty citrus, of a deeper rum born from it. It's intoxicating, and rich, and filled with burning, and need, and arousal, and instinct.

The scent of pack is all around, but all Minho can focus on is Jeongin.

"Hyung." A voice calls, weakly, a whining growl.

Minho feels light-headed, delirious as he looks into the scene before him, fighting against everything. All his instincts not to run to him, because Jeongin isn't alone. There are alphas around him, a

beta, an omega. The pack alpha is right there, and Minho knows his place. Still, achingly, he whispers hoarse and desperate, “*pup.*”

“Hey, hey, it’s okay, Innie, your hyung is here, hm? Minho-hyung is right there. All yours, isn’t he?” The pack alpha soothes from next to the baby alpha, inside a mess of blankets, clothing, and heavily scented cushions. *Nest.*

But it’s not, *his*, nest.

It’s someone else’s.

Drenched in pheromones, but underneath it all, Minho can tell the careful touch of scent from the omega who built it. All pumpkin and cream. *Shit.*

His eyes glance, widening a little to another omega who stares back, curiously, before his eyes go to Jeongin with worry. Felix. He remembers him, from before when they first met, and he was told all their names. This is the other omega. *His other omega.*

“Shh, Innie, don’t fight, it’s Minho’s decision if he comes, okay?” The pack alpha soothes.

Another alpha is running his fingers through Jeongin’s hair, a pretty alpha. Which is strange, startling even, he’s very lithe, and dangerous looking. Not good for Minho’s heart.

Changbin is sitting in front of, almost like a guiding stone between them, giving Minho a soft smile.

But nobody moves, nobody does anything, instead all of their attention shifts, soon the eyes one by one are on himself, as if waiting. As if expecting something, but Minho isn’t sure what. He feels lost, uncertain. He’s never been in this position before. So, he does what he’s supposed to in the absence of clarity, and looks to the pack alpha, eyes down, neck baring.

They all gasp, inhaling sharply.

Seungmin’s cloves are choking.

“N- No. Minho, you don’t have to- don’t do that. Don’t submit anymore to me, or to anyone, unless you want to, understand?” The pack alpha’s voice goes from confused, shaky, uncertain even, to strong, and authoritative.

This isn’t a question, now, not even the guise of one, it’s an order.

Minho straightens his head, obeying instantly, feeling confused, and a little frightened.

A few long tense moments pass, before Jisung near him says, carefully, “We can go back to your room, hyung, if you’ve changed your mind.”

Jeongin whines from the middle of them all, and Minho’s heart shakes, stabbing relentlessly, the pull so tight it feels stretched to a snapping point. His inner omega rallies so viciously, he bites his lip, and tastes blood.

Shaking his head, as he looks to Jisung, forgetting his place momentarily.

His heart bangs loudly in his head when he realizes, and stops himself.

“Then...” Seungmin says, uncertain.

Minho breathes, deeply, he can’t help it. He can’t wait any longer.

“Can I please enter your omega’s nest, alpha?”

The pack alpha startles, as if he’s been hit, eyes wide, and then turning pained. “Please ask Felix himself.” He says, with a polite tone that sounds a little forced.

Minho winces a little, of course the pack alpha is feigning politeness.

He probably hates that one of his lesser alphas wants some omega like himself so badly. It must pain him. Especially when there are so many better omegas right here. Smelling so good, so perfectly behaved, submissive, and not- not dirty. Used up. Like himself.

He obeys though, he knows how to do this much at least, turns to the omega, and bows a little lower. "May I please enter your next, omega?"

"Only if you call me Felix." He says back, voice a little deeper, and it's a nice voice. Really nice. "Please."

Minho gulps, and nods, testing the name on his tongue, "*Felix-ah.*"

Felix melts a little, and it makes Minho feel so strange in his heart.

He's so cute, so lovely. All his.

His omega.

"Hyung... please... I want to scent you..." Jeongin begs, fighting form his position not to move.

Slowly, gulping, heart thumping loudly with nerves, Minho approaches. He's careful about it, really slow, eyes watching the others, waiting for the other shoe to drop. Waiting for a growl, or a warning snarl, or their hands on him. Pinning him down, ripping these nice, warm clothes off, forcing his legs apart. Taking him again like all the others before him.

But, nothing happens.

He gets close, into the nest, next to Jeongin, and then there are hands. But they're his pup's. They're warm, and heated, and familiar. He smells the citrus underneath, the mint, he buries into it, the rum soaking through, in turn. His own inner omega whining at the lack of his own scent on Jeongin, on his alpha pup. It drives him crazy.

He scents back, greedily, taking heady gulps, as he presses his face into his skin, cheek, nose, along his jaw, down his throat, at his neck. Pressing right into his scent glands as Jeongin presses back into his, a whine from the alpha, and then the most pleasant sound as they settle together in the richness and overwhelming scents of the others. *Of pack.*

His pup rumbles.

An alphan rumble of contentment.

He can hear soft intakes of breaths, and gasps, and the soft nodes of surprise in the scents. Minho can't help but wonder, is this the first time, his pup...? But that can't be right, can it?

His face presses into Jeongin's neck, arms tightly held around, as the alpha keeps him flushed against him, and won't let go.

He feels the press of his cock then, a hard outline at his thigh, but Jeongin doesn't rut against him. Doesn't clumsily put his cock inside him. He just keeps his clothing on, a layer between them, even though it must be too hot. He's burning right now as it is. He just, keeps him here, nestled against him, and nuzzles into Minho's hair ever so often, hands pawing at him, bringing him closer, more firm, as if assuring himself each time that he's here. Real. *His*.

And Minho finds himself doing much the same.

Getting lost in it.

All those scents, Jeongin's... his pup... his mind is a haze, and he is so very tired, and sore. Fucking exhausted.

"Sleep, omega-hyung." Jeongin says, voice gravelly but deeper, more authoritative. Like an alpha. "Innie has you."

It takes the last of his resistance, he feels so safe, and warm, eyes slipping shut, drifting off daringly. Somehow, even forgetting all the others in the room, especially the other alphas.

-

He's drifting.

In the place a little further than the warm, familiar comfort of his in-between. He can still hear voices, muffled, but familiar. Feel Jeongin's arms tighten quickly around him, the painted breath along his skin. The scent deepening into him, his heartbeat syncing. His body relaxing even more, until the voices become tangible, syllables rolling together, forming familiar words. Sentences. The distinct feeling that it's his ears that should be burning. That they

must be talking about him.

“...malnutrition, hyung...” It sounds like Jisung, one of his omegas.

Minho feels a whine building up in his throat, hands itching to reach for him, *come closer baby*, come here please.

He bites on it, swallows it up.

There’s nothing alphas hate more than an uncontrollable omega, who can’t even keep their instincts in check. Who do, or say anything out of turn, without permission.

“...cracked toenails... white splotches of skin... his fingernails... scars, hyung, so many.” Jisung’s voice sounds pained, rough. Minho hates it.

It digs into Minho himself, aches there with him, he tries to reach him, it’s too difficult. He stays still, feels Jeongin’s lips at his neck, tongue poking out a little. Feels himself begin to slick. He expects his clothes to be ripped off, expects Jeongin to push inside him, filling him up with his cock, knotting him desperately, rutting inside as others watch.

He doesn’t, just kisses him with only his lips, sighing shakily, nuzzling in deeper.

The voice continues.

“Sungie, nobody trusts your medical judgement more than I, but he needs to see a doctor, an expert.” *Pack alpha*, Minho would recognize Chan’s voice anywhere. He has to, his survival, and the protection of his omegas, his pups depends on it. He stiffens, feels Jeongin’s hand begin to rub along his arm, soothingly, scent overpowering into his own. Trying to calm him, make him pliant again.

“He doesn’t want that.” Seungmin’s voice is tight, angry, and filled with an argumentative tone, that has Minho on edge.

Chan sighs, gently. “I know, Minnie, but we have no choice. What if there are internal injuries? More serious issues? I won’t let

anyone in my care hurt like this.”

“Chan-hyung-”

Minho feels flushed, and confused, and uncertain.

That possessive tone, becomes authoritative, domineering. All alpha. “I’m sorry, Seungmin-ah, but I’ve decided on this... I’ll talk to Minho when he’s back with us. We’ll figure it out, then.”

He can’t help the way his heart stops a little, fear overtaking. He begs silently for Seungmin to stop talking, to stop making the alpha angry. Feels himself ready to jump up, get in-between, risk it all. His inner omega clawing to protect what’s his.

Seungmin’s voice is cold, “we can talk to him again about it, but I won’t let you force him into anything.”

It’s not just him, the whole energy around them, the scents, the tension, it’s all thick, tense. Waiting for something to happen. He can hear the other’s freezing, uncertain. Wary, even. It makes Minho even more afraid for Seungmin. Makes him feel murderous, too, all at once. He, *really*, despises this alpha. How dare he, threaten, *his*, omega?

Quietly, gently, “okay, Minnie-ah, we’ll do it your way, but we will talk to him. We’ll go from there.”

It’s shocking, that’s what it is, this deference.

It makes no sense.

Minho sucks in a breath, and feels Jeongin whine, feels his cock throbbing at his thigh through the clothing separating them. Can feel, and smell how much he needs to rut now, needs to knot someone.

He braces himself for impact, but sudden hands are on him, pulling him away gently, but firmly. Until he’s stumbling with a rapidly clearing mind out of the nest, Changbin’s hands like a brand on his skin. All heat, and protective intent, shielding him a little behind himself, as he feels and smells Jisung’s lavender come up behind

him.

“Shh, it’s okay, hyung, Innie just needs to knot again. Let’s get out of here, and give him a little space, okay?” Jisung says gently.

Minho feels like his heart was ripped out of him, frozen, like prey, he can’t move until slowly, Changbin lets go, one last look at Jeongin as if to make sure, before turning to Minho, looking sheepish, and apologetic. Even more so when Seungmin hisses from somewhere across the room, “*Changbin.*”

“Sorry.” He says. “I didn’t mean to... I just... I’m trying to protect you, hyung. I’ll be more considerate next time.”

Minho nods dutifully to this faux apology. No one apologizes to omegas. Not really. Not unless there’s something in it for them.

“It’s okay.” He murmurs, looking past the beta carefully, having to make sure that Jeongin is okay first.

What he sees makes him flush deeply.

The other omega, *Felix*, is climbing nakedly onto Jeongin who somehow has lost his clothing by another alpha’s hands. *Hyunjin*. Jeongin’s body is skinnier from the days of lack of food, but he still has his strong frame, and is flushed all over. Naked, cock hard and thick at his stomach, aching as Felix straddles him, lining himself up, sinking down on the cock with his head thrown back, looking so pretty it hurts.

Slick pools at the base, helping them to ease together, *mate*. Low groans and moans from the both of them at the feeling of being inside, and the feeling of being full.

Everyone else gathered around, giving comfort, soft praises, all together in a beautiful nest full of pack, and warmth, and safety.

Felix, being a good omega, letting his alpha knot him. Rut into him, empty his seed, and make his belly full.

That should be him.

Minho quickly looks away, heart thumping, a strange yearning, a pull tight in his chest, face on fire.

He knows they can smell his desire, but nobody mentions it as Jisung quickly escorts him out.

“Shit, sorry, I didn’t mean- Come on, hyung, let’s get you back to your room, okay?” Jisung is very nice about it, the door shutting behind them. The sudden hallway’s lights being too bright, and the sudden lack of scents, overwhelming in its own way. It’s like a burst of cold winter air though, clearing Minho’s hazy mind almost immediately.

The desire dissipates almost instantaneously, even though he still feels wet, clothes stained with it. It’s embarrassing, but again, Jisung is too nice, not mentioning it, just guiding him into his room.

He goes, silently, almost on autopilot, as a strange feeling builds in his chest.

Like emotion.

Like.

He can’t hold back.

“I- I’m sorry, can I- I need...” He can’t voice it. It’s wrong. He needs. He needs to be good. Do what his owner wants him to. Which is this pack now. The pack alpha. But. It builds.

Jisung stands there, patient, face open and kind, if not a bit worried. “What is it, hyung? Take your time.”

He can’t.

“Shh, it’s okay, you can tell me. I won’t tell anyone, okay? I’m an omega too, we can look out for each other.” He leans in, whispering almost conspiratorial. Just them, their own little world.

This settles something in him, a little of the nervousness, and anxiety evaporating as he nods in understanding. “I- I need to be alone.”

Jisung blinks, a little taken aback, surprised, and then a soft, tender smile fills his features.

“hyung, I’m so proud of you! Of course you can! Thank you so much for telling me what you need. Please always tell me, I don’t want to do something you hate.” He looks two seconds away from pouncing on him, hugging him, touching, *scenting*, even. And for a moment, Minho burns for it, longs for it, but then Jisung takes a deliberate step back.

“My room is right over there, come and get me if you need anything, okay?”

Jisung waits for a response, so Minho nods.

And then he goes.

Just like that.

Strange.

It can’t be that easy, can it?

He watches Jisung disappear into another room, and finds himself left in the hallway outside his own door, startled, uncertain. But being out in the open is worse, he quickly turns, opens the door, and steps inside, relief in his breath when he finds it empty, and just as he left it. The only scents are his own, the lightest bit of cloves and spice, and lavender from Seungmin and Jisung, who were here briefly.

He moves quickly into the bathroom, feels himself removing his clothing, reaching for the shower. All wet, *embarrassing*, slick stained in the nice clothes the omegas gave him, the nicest he’s ever had. But he stops himself before his hand can close around the tap.

He smells like Innies.

His pup.

And the pack, all of them.

And he remembers how they looked, how they smelled.

Happy. Content. *Complete*.

He looks down at his shirt in his hand, and gulps.

That feeling grows, builds, his eyes can't help but turn to the small linen closet in the bathroom, door wide open to show him that there's nothing hiding here. It's small.

But he doesn't care, with that thing building too greatly, and that lump in his throat becoming too much, Minho moves to the closet. He shuts the door, feels his breath catch at the lock inside, and turns it with a click. He removes his clothing among the towels and extra blankets with neutralizing scent, and presses the pack scented clothing, *his pup's scented* clothing into a way that makes the most sense.

The way it builds up inside, to be let out.

Not like that, he thinks, twisting the shirt, *like this*. And then he moves onto the next, and the next, until he's all done.

It's not much, when he's done. But it's enough for him to curl up, and feel a deep rattling relieving breath on his lips as he becomes surrounded in it. In all of them. *Pack*. Something settling deep within, that anxious feeling under his skin, disappearing almost entirely.

His omegas.

His pup.

Finally, he relaxes completely.

Every last defence, falls. He can't help it. The way he slowly slips in like liquid honey. Mind, blissfully haze filled, and empty.

He hasn't slept this well, in years.

Chapter 5

Notes:

first of all, sorry... 🙏. second of all, this chapter just got a little too long, so im putting the rest in the next one, 🤔.
hope you enjoy!!

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[[a little spoiler for next chapter as compensation is that Felix will be making a stronger appearance. :))
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Chapter Text

It must be snowing.

It's his first clear thought in days, it breaks through the haze like sunshine streaming through storm clouds. It hits him squarely in the chest, just how clear everything is, as if he didn't realize until this realization of clarity, how frazzled his mind really was. How thick, and deep he seemed to be under. *Under what?* Minho gulps thickly, and fearfully at the thought. It wasn't quite what's expected of omega's, it was more like an in-between. Going down fully is not an option for him, but slipping that far, his hand trembles a little at the thought.

Or maybe that's the ache, the bone deep ache he woke up to. The draft of cold in the small linen closet, despite the extra towels, and blankets arranged, and clothing to make a makeshift nest- skin blushing at the thought of it and its inadequacy, *no one can see this*. The draft is unmistakable. The kind of cold weather that hangs in the air, indoors or not, the kind that makes his wrist, crawling up his hand ache painfully. His left hand grasping onto it. That one aching slightly too.

It's not pain, really, just an ache that's dull and continuous. A phantom imprint of something before that can't quite go away.

It hurt more when the injuries actually happened. This is, barely anything. But the way it continues to ache tells him the draft is from the cold air. That it must be cold enough for snow to fall. His wrists always ache when it snows.

It's much warmer here, than his previous owners, but it doesn't stop the ache at all. It's still there, silent until it can't be anymore.

A faint knocking steals his breath, the soft, "Minho-hyung?" Muffled, coming through three doors, but unmistakable in familiarity.

It's Jisung again.

And then he remembers, the last couple of days, how he stayed here curled up, and how Jisung or Seungmin only came by to give him meals, and take old dishes away. After he told them he needed to be alone, he didn't expect to actually be left alone. And yet, they never lingered. Never stayed longer, never forced their way in.

He gulps, clear-headed for the first time in days, and clutches at his wrist one last time, flexing both appendages, before getting up on shaky feet, and making his way out of the closet, into the bathroom. Cold feet hit the tile, and it's a shock, he bites back a whimper, knows better than to make any noise, and scrambles for clothing.

More of the soft, big things he had before. The dresser in the bedroom is filled with them.

He shuffles to the door once he's dressed, and opens the door, hesitantly.

"Jisung-ah?" He asks, gently, feeling strangely vulnerable. Almost timid and afraid, his heart hammers.

He shut the linen closet door on his nest, but that doesn't mean they won't come in it.

He's only property after all, it would only be their right.

But the way they left him alone for so long when he so boldly asks gives him a tentative hope he can't deny, or push away as much as

he tries to. It comes back to the surface, mocks him, tells him this time things are going to be different, as if they ever have before.

“Hyung.” Jisung’s face breaks out into a smile, relief his gaze. “We’ve been trying for a few hours, I was worried.”

Huh? A few hours?

He can’t help it, he blurts out his next question, “Why didn’t you just come in?”

Seungmin’s eyes grow intense, his scent more so, forcing Minho’s attention to the other omega who looks so upset, filled with ire that could burn towns.

“It’s your territory, hyung, and in this pack, in this den, we respect each other’s territory. No one is allowed in without permission.” Seungmin’s tone is absolute.

Minho tries to see the trick in it, the hidden meaning, but he can’t find it. It’s confusing, his head pounds. His wrists still ache, he ignores. Distractions make it hurt less. Almost as if it’s not even there.

He thinks about the other omega’s nest, Felix’s, and the pack leader’s firm voice of having him give permission. A mere omega, for him to enter. But obviously, the pack alpha had the final say, right?

“I can see your head thinking too hard, hyung. If you have questions, just ask.” Seungmin says pointedly.

Jisung elbows him gently. “Maybe he’s a little more subtle than you.”

Seungmin sighs briefly, and turns to him, “Minho-hyung, was there anything else you want to ask us?”

He shakes his head quickly, despite his heart pounding, despite all of the questions that rise up like a tidal wave, threatening to pull him under. Who exactly this pack is? What the rules are? What is he supposed to do? What is his place? When will he have to present for

the pack leader? He should have him first, shouldn't he?

And most of all, how is Jeongin?

That thought alone, almost makes him speak, nervous, uncertain.

Somehow, Jisung picks up on this, maybe it's his scent. He's never been good at hiding it. After a certain point, there's no point in doing that. He becomes... *stripped away*. There's nothing left of himself. Nothing left of his own. And yet... *Innie*.

"Innie's okay, his rut went well, his presentation in general, it was good." Jisung says, as if reading his mind, eyes earnest. "If you want to see him again, you can but... he's very tired. Sleeping like a log right now." He giggles softly at the thought, maybe at the memory. And it's such a sweet sound, Minho can't help the small uplift of his own lips, staring at Jisung giggling, as his heart does that funny thing again with his omegas.

"Besides, there's something we have to discuss with you." Seungmin says quickly, voice more serious, eyes a little uncomfortable, maybe even annoyed.

And, well, Minho braces himself.

This is it.

Either it's time to get on his knees, or they'll kick him out. Realizing how old he is, how used, how many owners he had before. Or maybe his defects, maybe it's the way Jeongin called for him in the middle of his first rut, maybe the pack alpha hates him to the point of contention. Or worse.

He wants to beg then, get on his knees, promise he can take the alphas' knots well. Do whatever they need done. He can clean, he can cook. He can serve them well. Just- Just let him stay with his pup.

"It's Chan-hyung." Seungmin starts.

No! His inner omega whines, and he has to bite in the inside of his cheek so hard again, he tastes blood. His instincts narrow in, and he

feels half-crazed, on the way to feral.

"I told him you didn't want to see a doctor, but he's insisting we talk about it again. Will you come with us to discuss it?" Seungmin finishes, with a loud breath of anger.

Minho blinks, stares, confused.

That's it?

"Minho-hyung, are you okay?" Jisung says then, worried, lavender sweetly curled. "You don't have to."

He's already shaking his head against that thought. No matter how caught off-guard he is, of course he'll be there. Of course he'll go. This is the pack alpha summoning him, he doesn't have a choice, and even if he did try to fight it- *and how is he even thinking of such a thing at all-* his omegas will suffer for it. For not bringing him as ordered.

"No. No, I'll- I'll go." He says, quickly.

Seungmin's jaw tenses, and Minho wants to apologize, but he's keeping him safe, he tells himself. By going. And that's more important than anything.

"Okay, but remember, hyung, it's your choice. No matter what Chan-hyung says, okay?" Seungmin says firmly.

It's another trick of course, a double-meaning. It has to be.

And yet, Seungmin says he likes things matter-of-fact.

Minho's head aches too now, his wrist throbbing faintly, as he nods. The only thing he can think to do as Seungmin stands there staring at him, as if waiting for an answer.

"Okay." Seungmin says, slowly, and deliberately. "Chan-hyung is waiting for us in the kitchen, uh, neutral ground, so to speak. Our territories are our bedrooms here, by the way." Seungmin continues to explain as they begin to move down the hallway. "We each have our own bathrooms, but rooms like the living room, kitchen, and

the main bathroom are neutral territory. Outside, it's the same. Of course, it's pack territory, but it's neutral within the pack, okay, hyung? You can go to these places without permission. But other's rooms, especially nests, consent is required."

Minho nods quickly, absorbing all the information as much as possible. This is good, he thinks. These are rules, things he can listen to, and do. He relaxes somewhat, but it's not entirely everything he's looking for. How to act in front of alphas for one, and the pack alpha especially for two.

Is he supposed to fight a lesser alpha in the pack if they try to knot him before the pack alpha?

Do the omegas orders get ignored if the lesser alphas order him something, even if it's the pack alpha speaking through the omegas?

His breath shudders.

"Are you okay, hyung?" Jisung's eyes are wide, worried.

Minho nods, smiling tightly. "Yes, sorry, it's just- it's a lot."

Seungmin's eyes soften. "If you have any question, just ask us, okay? Any of us."

He agrees easily, even though he knows that won't be happening. That's not how this works, is it? Maybe this pack is different? Truthfully, he's never really been in a pack- *pack*. He was always his owners' exclusively, unless-

He stops himself.

He doesn't want to think about that, and besides, they're here.

His breath catches a little as they stand at the threshold of a large kitchen. In the center is a large table, and chairs. Enough to seat ten.

In the middle, the pack alpha sits, waiting patiently with a steaming mug between his hands.

When he notices them enter, he turns, and smiles gently. It makes his eyes turn into suns, truly blinding, and so kind. He's so handsome, and younger than Minhø remembers, but then again he was a little, *hazy*, the last couple of times. Possibly scent drunk in the nest, with his pup, and- and everyone else.

"Hi, Minhø-ssi, why don't you sit down?" Chan motions his hand to the chair across from him, not getting up himself, or moving. Staying perfectly still, as Minhø gulps, and nods, moving to sit down, to follow his orders.

His hands clutch tightly in his lap, head lowered, half-bowed in respect.

His heart hammers, ears flushed red. Why didn't he look him in the eyes the first time? He knows better.

But, surprisingly, Chan doesn't seem angry. *Maybe he's saving it for later*, a mocking voice says inwardly, Minhø ignores it, tries to focus.

"Would you like something hot to drink?" Chan says. "The snow just came in last night, our furnace wasn't set correctly, kind of forgot with everything." He says it sheepishly, almost apologetic.

"I knew it." Jisung mutters from next to him, as he pulls out a chair and sits next to Minhø, making his heart leap a little.

"Sorry, it should be fixed soon." Chan says quickly, then to Minhø, because he's speaking to him obviously, but because despite his eyes lowered down on the table, burning a hole into the wood there desperately, Minhø can feel Chan's heavy gaze. It's like a thousand suns now. He feels small, and child-like. "Would you like tea, or coffee? Hot chocolate?"

Is there a right answer?

He shakes his head no.

Chan hums. "Okay, uh, Seungmin-ah, would you like to sit down as well?"

He can feel Seungmin's anger, it vibrates off him in spiced clove thick enough to burn.

"I think, I'll stand, hyung." Seungmin says, and it sounds so much like a challenge, that Minho's heart stops in his chest.

His actions are only out of fear, and his inner omega growling one desperate thing, *protect*.

He looks up to behind him where Suengmin stands with his arms crossed over his chest staring Chan down. An alpha. *The pack alpha*. Minho reacts, quickly, and tells him a little desperately, "please sit, Seungmin." He says, but when Seungmin won't budge, he gathers his courage, and says, "I'd feel more comfortable."

He berates himself for those choice of words, as if they would do anything, but then, he catches it. Hesitancy in Seungmin's gaze, eyes softening, briefly glancing to his own desperate ones, then back to glaring at Chan, before becoming so gentle on his own in defiance but acceptance all at once. "Fine."

He sits.

Chan breathes a little in relief, and then Minho catches his gaze, sees the soft surprise there, a little awe, and something else. But not anger, far from it, which is surprising.

He looks away before it can be put into words, heart hammering in his skull.

He grips his wrist tightly, the dull ache continues, spreads into his thumb, like tendrils. Some invisible monster. Through the large window in the kitchen he didn't dare look out of, he notices it, the way the snow falls almost softly against the panes.

His own room has a window, but there are large drape-like curtains closed tightly over it. He doesn't dare touch them. Afraid to see bars. Afraid.

"Thank you for agreeing to speak with me, Minho-ssi. I wanted to make a few things clear. The first and most obvious, is that you are welcome to stay with us for as long as you want, our Innie has

made it quite clear how much you mean to him, and what you did for him.” Chan’s voice goes from formal, to amused, to heart-wrenching. “We are very grateful.” Thick with emotion.

Minho can’t help it, the way a lump burns in his throat, the way this does things to him he can’t hope to describe. The way he can’t help but think about how loved Jeongin is, *his pup*, how much he loves him too.

Cold nights, and his warmth, pressed so tightly... the memories flicker. Only Jeongin makes them good, his presence. It’s the only thing worth remembering in all those years he’s been handed from one owner to another.

Seungmin clears his throat then.

“Ah, yes, um, this goes without saying, but we aren’t your owners.” Chan says, quickly.

This makes Minho’s heart still, and almost makes him look sharply up to the pack alpha, he refrains. For a moment, dangerous, forbidden hope pounds in his chest, and then he remembers himself. Remembers the last time an alpha promised him freedom. Remembers how that ended.

He clutches at his wrist even tighter.

“You don’t have any owners, okay? That was... an illegal enterprise. Nobody owns omegas anymore. Omegas aren’t property, especially not in my pack. That being said, we do still follow a hierarchy, and we do respect each other here. We discuss things calmly, and come to decisions, and solutions together. Sometimes, if I deem it necessary, I use my authority as pack alpha to bypass this process, but it is rare.”

Minho bites his tongue.

He tries not to think. Tries not to let it hit him too hard. How that tentative hope has just been crushed deftly between two fingers of a pack alpha.

Of course he has the authority, of course he has the final say. The rest

is just... window dressing. A way to make it look pretty good to the outside, but from within, they all better obey. Still, it's something new, and unexpected.

"That being said, since you are under my care, I would really like you to see a doctor, an expert in long-term conditions such as yours, who can assess you completely. To help come up with a plan to getting you well again." Chan continues, voice a little more urgent, kind of pleading.

It's strange, and it doesn't make a whole lot of sense, but of course if the pack alpha wants it, he'll do it.

"Minho-hyung," Seungmin's voice cuts in right before he can say anything, "you don't have to do this, if you don't want to. It's your choice, right, Chan-hyun?"

Chan stares back at the omega, with barely contained frustration. "Yes, of course, but-"

"Then, he doesn't need to do it, if he doesn't want to."

Minho's heart steals, his breath intakes sharply. He can feel Jisung's unstable lavender as the Seungmin and Chan's scents grow bitter, and burning, angry and discontented.

Chan's voice becomes full of dominance and authority, "*Seungmin-ah*." The gentleness to it, doesn't hide the way Minho's own inner omega urges him to submit, to stop this escalating, to get in-between his omega, and this alpha. To protect.

"I want to." He says quickly, too quickly perhaps.

Seungmin is looking at him with frustration. "No, hyung, you don't have to."

He smiles, and assures him, "I want to."

Inside his heart is going too fast, and he's begun to tremble. But he hides it. Hides it so well, neither notice. His scent is tinged in sour grapefruit, but it's been like this since he knew he'd be speaking with the pack alpha. They don't notice this either.

“Okay, good. Thank you, Minhossi, I’ve already set up an appointment. We’ll go today.” Chan’s voice rings out relieved, and happy.

His scent no longer holds that burning bitter taste.

But Seungmin’s still lingers in it.

“Minho-hyung, you really don’t have to.” Seungmin turns to him, whispers it just for them.

He turns back to him, feels their world narrow in, feels the heat of the omega, sees how pretty he is up close, how strong and determined. He’s so close, he could kiss him. Thinks it would be sweet, despite Seungmin’s stubbornness and hard exterior sometimes. Thinks he’d just melt into it.

“Hyung will go.” He tells him, gently, chancing a touch, very gentle along Seungmin’s cheek, fingers brushing. Watches as the omega’s skin erupts into flames at the press, as he gulps, and looks endearingly shy. *Soft.*

Minho feels his own heart thump wildly in his chest, beating like its never beat before.

“Hm. Fine, but I’ll come with you, if you want.” Seungmin tells him.

He nods, quickly, agreeing. Appeasing both of them.

He can do this.

For his omegas, and his pup, he can do anything.

“Then, we’ll see my omega doctor.” Seungmin declares, looking to Chan almost challenging him to say something against this.

Meanwhile, Minho can’t help but freeze, confused, uncertain.

Chan is smiling though, looking back at Seungmin with affection. “Of course, she’s the one I called.”

Seungmin huffs a little. “Good.”

For his own part, he's beyond confused. An omega doctor? Is that... normal? Possible?

Seungmin looks to him, smiling. "Trust me, hyung, she's amazing."

He nods, silently, still a mess of confusion, but not about this. About what Seungmin says about trusting him. About doing that. Somehow, he finds that part easy. Which is perhaps the most confusing part.

"Come on, Minho-hyung, it's cold outside, you need a sweater, and a jacket." Jisung says gently from his right, hands hovering, as if it were his nature to touch, tug, pull towards- but he stops himself. Biting a little anxiously on his lip, looking down to Minho's lap where his hands are clutched together tightly. Left over his right, thumb along the inside wrist, rubbing over the tender ache.

Upon seeing Jisung's gaze, his heart startles, and he stops himself, looking over to Chan quickly to gauge his reaction on him leaving. Not quite looking at his eyes, instead looking down, peeking just out the corner of them hurriedly, wanting to go so Jisung will stop biting. Minho almost wants to reach out himself, and stop it. But he doesn't, he knows his place, especially in front of the pack alpha who looks... *sad*. Eyes downturned as he gives a small nod of silent assent to his silent question.

As soon as he does, Minho gets up quickly, and Jisung does to. He follows him out of the room down the hall back to his room.

"Can I come in, hyung? I can show you where the jacket is. We always keep extra clothing in here for our family when they visit." Jisung tells him.

He gulps a little guilt pressing into his sternum. Is he preventing that from happening again? For their family to visit?

He nods, quickly, feels a rush of nervousness when Jisung walks near the bathroom door, but he doesn't go in. Gets nowhere near close to his nest. Making him sigh in relief. It's nothing special, it's just, that, well, it's not meant for others. It's sad, and small, and he shouldn't be making a nest anyway. Some of his past owners really

hated it, and some did worse to his sacred space. He's worried, uncertain. Besides, despite what he saw early with Felix's, for himself, he's just an outsider. It has to be different. He's different.

"Here, hyung, try it on, see if it fits." Jisung pulls out a sweater, large and white, and a jacket, darker, zipping up for winter.

He hasn't had this much clothing in years, let alone a sweater, or a jacket. Alphas hate it when they don't have continuous access to their property.

But Jisung looks so hopeful, and Chan nodded his approval.

Minho gulps, and reaches for the material.

It's so soft, he almost gasps, eyes widening.

"Comfy, right?" Jisung asks, as he slips it on.

He nods, feels so very warm, and strangely content. The last of the chill leaves him, and he wonders if he can still wear this when he comes back. The material brushes against his wrists, warming them considerably. It helps a little.

Jisung sighs a little then, sitting down on the bed with some annoyance. "I'm sorry about Minnie and Chan-hyung. They're not usually this confrontational, but they're both really only worried about you. They just have different ways of showing it."

Minho is lost, it must show, because Jisung's lips frown a little, but then he continues with, "Seungmin's concern is about your agency, to make your own choices, and not being forced into anything. Chan is too, but he's an alpha, you know?"

Minho does know, and he doesn't.

What is Jisung talking about?

"Chan-hyung wants to make sure you're safe, healthy, and well provided for. That can't happen if you're hurting, or not well, and he needs to be sure. That place..." Jisung's face turns disgusted, and horrified, and sad, flickering between all the emotions before

turning into a small, sad, smile, wiping the rest away. “Anyway, hyung, they’re both just doing they’re best. And honestly, I think Seungmin’s just taking it really hard right now. He’s been acting as head omega for so long, without actually, you know, having that position. He never really wanted it, but his personality, it fit too well.”

Head omega?

“Jisung-ah.” He says gently, confused, eyes looking away, heart pounding.

“Yeah, hyung?”

“What is a head omega?”

Jisung blinks, startled. “You don’t know?”

He shakes his head. “My... my father was a lone alpha.” He says, carefully.

Jisung’s eyes widen even more, and then his lip trembles, tears well up, and Minho panics a little.

“I- I’m sorry, I-”

“It’s okay, hyung. A head omega is just someone who takes care of the pack. Like Chan-hyung, only just a little bit different. Packs don’t necessarily need one, but the bigger they are, the more it helps, well, with everything. We’ve been fine without one, and Seungmin always stepped into that role when necessary, but he’s so very young, you know? And he has so much to worry about with law school, now actually practicing law... I try to help, but I don’t have much authority in me.” He chuckles shyly. “And now with Innies presenting, it’s a new dynamic. I guess that’s the best way to explain it. They’re both on edge because of that too.”

Before he can say more, mouth a little open to do just that, what exactly, he’s not sure, a knock at the door stops the both of them.

“Hyung? It’s time to go, if you still want to.” Seungmin calls out, gently.

Jisung smiles at him. “Did you want me to come, hyung?”

He shakes his head against that, can already see the way Jisung’s leg is bouncing in some anxious energy.

He’s already anxious enough, he doesn’t want his scent to enmesh more of that onto Jisung, doesn’t want to hurt him. Cause him distress.

“Okay.” Jisung frowns slightly, then grins. “I’ll be waiting here when you get back, if you need me, just call me on Minnie’s phone, okay?”

It’s a nice gesture, but there’s no way Minho would do that to his omega. To Jisung, all lovely, and kind, and too pure for this cruel world. And well, doctors are some of the cruelest. Even having Seungmin is too much.

He remembers all the visits, when he was bought the first few times.

All the exams.

The checks.

His fingers wring together, his wrist aches, he ignores it, and turns to the door.

-

He’s tense, his left hand held tightly around his right wrist. He can’t help it, the flash of cold, despite the jacket, and warm sweater, and the boots that are fuzzy inside, has his head aching dully. Worse than before.

He feels Seungmin look down, with a grimacing expression, and feels his heart startle, settling only when Seungmin tells him, “It’s okay to be nervous, hyung, but Dr. Seo is really great. She’s helped me a lot.”

He nods, grateful that he thinks that’s all this is. The last thing he wants is for them to see another flaw in him. Another reason to

send him away, he knows he's already intruding, way too much. He feels sick with it, light-headed. There's people everywhere, a lot of omegas, and it's so very strange, and unfamiliar with how bare their necks are. Only his holds a collar, and he has to fight not to touch it, press it against his fingertips, feel the tug of it against his skin.

On the other side of Seungmin who is in the middle, is Chan. His eyes glance over to Minhø occasionally, an encouraging press of his voice that feels like white noise. The nerves getting worse when he speaks. It's always worse the louder they are, the more anger.

"Lee Minhø." A kind voice calls from the desk.

Minhø looks up, feels his breath steal.

"It's okay, hyung, I'll come in with you for a minute if you want?" Seungmin asks, always asking, eyes waiting for a response. Looking at him as if any is possible, but behind him looms the pack alpha, and although Minhø can't bring himself to meet his gaze, not only for nerves, but also for the proper etiquette when addressing an alpha, let alone the pack alpha- he knows that this can't really be an optional thing, a question.

He nods, throat thick.

They are led to an exam room, ushered inside, barely a few minutes before a kind but professional omega walks in. Her nametag reads, '**Dr. Seo**,' but it's so bizarre, that Minhø almost doesn't believe it at first.

"Hi, Mr. Lee, I'm Dr. Seo. And Seungmin, it's good to see you again." She says professionally over her glasses.

Seungmin grins, a little wickedly. "Don't worry, we're not here for me, I've been taking your words seriously, Dr. Seo."

She smiles back. "I should hope so." A little familiarity between them that relaxes him despite himself. The doctor turns to him next, "you can have family, or pack with you if you'd like, but I always do an intake alone with my patients, or if you'd prefer a nurse can accompany us."

He shakes his head against that, already anxious enough with one person.

Seungmin looks to him, and gives him a smile, but his eyes are worried. "It will be okay, hyung, I'll be right outside if you need me, okay?"

He nods, feels sick once the door shuts, and it's just the two of them. But he eases somewhat when Dr. Seo sits in a chair opposite from him, a small barely there scent of omegan vanilla fills the room. He relaxes, can't help it, takes a few breaths.

"From what I know you would like to have a general assessment done of your overall health, is that correct?" She asks.

He nods, yes, that's what the pack alpha wants.

Dr. Seo smiles, professionally. "Well, first let's go over some ground rules. According to the law, I, as a medical professional cannot disclose your medical information to anyone. Anything you tell me concerning your health stays between me, and you, unless you want to hurt yourself, or others. If I don't abide by this I will lose my license, and I worked really hard for it. It's my favourite thing about my life, okay?"

His head feels a little dizzy, is this another trick question?

He knows about medical privacy, but-

"Okay." He says, softly.

"How about this, I'll tell you something I'd like us to do, to help understand your overall health better, and you can tell me, yes or no if you'd like to do it or not. How does that sound?"

It sounds dangerous, sounds like a test. Like something he'll lose.

"Okay." He murmurs.

She smiles, nods, once. "Alright, first thing's first, and this is really important, are you hurting anywhere, right now? Do you feel any pain?"

His wrists throb, as if accusing him of something. He gulps, shakes his head. The lie tastes bitter on his tongue, even though he technically didn't say anything.

"Alright." She nods. "Another very important question, and this one might be a little tough, but I really need you to answer honestly. It's important for omegan health, especially male omegas."

His breath catches, and his lungs seize. The air shifts, and the tension grows. He steals himself, and risks looking into her eyes as she says, not unkindly, and yet it's like she's hitting him deeply in the chest, his inner omega becoming half crazed, somewhat feral, "Mr. Lee have you ever been pregnant before?"

Chapter 6

Notes:

i said more felix, but then the chapter got away from me, as per usual....
i hope you like it!!

Chapter Text

He didn't have a name. There was no time to choose one, he didn't even live to be anything. The other omegas he met at the auction houses sometimes held their bellies as if they were with a pup, making the guards have to explicitly tell their clients that these omegas were verified pup-free. Minho often wondered about that, why they would hold themselves as if they carried a baby inside, a look on their faces that was... *stripped away*.

A few years down the line, he understood why.

Because he started doing it too.

-

"Mr. Lee Minho-ssi?" Dr. Seo's gentle voice catches him off-guard, he gulps, looks to her, feels the world become visible again. He's no longer back there, the cage doors aren't around him. When his fingers curl around the collar at his throat, it's a soft material, and loose, and still smells faintly of cloves and spice. *Seungmin*.

He looks to the exam room door, a low guttural whine building in his throat. What if he's not there? What if it was all an illusion? A lie?

The doctor's eyes look to the door, then back to Minho, without a word, she gets up and opens it. "Mr. Kim Seungmin, can you please come inside?"

It takes only seconds before Seungmin is there, walking in quickly, eyes wide and worried when they land on his own. But that's all it

takes for Minho to feel himself crashing. He holds back the tears, and the sounds, and his inner omega's sudden sharp instinct to collapse, and breathes only once. Deep, and purposeful.

It wasn't a dream.

He's really here.

"Minho-hyung? Are you okay?" Seungmin approaches slowly, uncertain.

Minho curls his fingers tighter in his lap, it makes his wrist hurt more, ache faintly, but he doesn't care. It helps him stay out of the shadows of his own memories, and his own mind. They're so sharp and visceral sometimes, unsure where reality ends, and nightmares begin. But Seungmin's scent is sharp if not faint, and it clears his head a little, reminds him of the past few days. Reminds him of his pup, of Innie still clinging faintly to Seungmin. He's real. He waits for him. There's no denying it.

"Can I come closer, hyung?" Seungmin asks.

He nods, and Seungmin breathes a little shakily before he's standing next to him, eyes turning to Dr. Seo. "What happened?" His voice is low and dangerous, protective, and angry.

The doctor takes no offense, even as Minho reaches for the other omega, fingers curled into his jacket. "I'm fine." He says.

Seungmin blinks back at him, uncertain.

Dr. Seo looks to Minho and smiles a little, politely. "Why don't we go ahead with those tests like we talked about? Shall we ask Seungmin to leave?"

His fingers tighten on the omega more severely. "He can stay." He finds the courage to say, heart pounding in his skull. His instincts warring. He needs to be a good omega, and stay with this pack to be with his pup, but on the other hand, if Seungmin finds out- and then the rest of the pack about his past. About how broken he is, how defective, will they really keep him? Look at how big their pack is, and no little pups running around. What if that's what they

want.

He can't give that.

"Alright." Dr Seo says. "If that changes, you must tell me, or him, or any of my staff. It's okay if Mr. Lee changes his mind, isn't it Mr. Kim?"

Seugmin's face contorts into uncomfortable disgust before he looks to Minh, forcing a smile. "You never have to be afraid to say what you want. Do you remember what Chan-hyung said? We don't own you, nobody does, which means you can make your own choices. Every choice."

He nods, heart thumping a little, pull tight inside. "I want you to stay." He answers firmly.

He doesn't want to be alone.

He... He... *trusts him*.

His eyes widen a little as he stares into Seungmin at the realization.

"What is it, hyung?"

His skin burns a little, he shakes his head against mention it, ducking down. "Nothing."

Seungmin looks a little frustrated, and concerned, but doesn't push it, as Dr. Seo brings in a nurse and a little container held by a handle full of vials, and needles. Minh swallows down the sudden bile, and looks away, towards Seungmin, face brushing against his arm, his jacket, scent enveloping him of cloves and spice, jasmine, everyone else's mixed together, *pack*. It comforts him. Fingers curled into the omega who tentatively holds him back.

"We would like to start with some blood tests. To determined nutritional levels, and to screen for any disease or illness." Dr. Seo explains. "Are you alright with that, Mr. Lee?"

He nods quickly, feels his breath intake sharply.

They always give him one before an auction, to make sure alphas can try to breed him without worry. Sometimes he gets one after he's sold too, it's nothing new, it just always takes a lot out of him. Dizziness, woozy, and often blacking out.

He doesn't mention this now, it's not as if he's afraid, his body just reacts.

"I'm going to remove your jacket sleeve, and roll up your sweater and shirt sleeve, okay?" Dr. Seo says professionally.

He nods from where he's burrowed in Seungmin's jacket, and bites down on his cheek, waiting for the inevitable.

Feels the tight band being tied, feels the cool swab of alcohol, feels the small prick of a needle, and then... a draining feeling.

Black dots swarm his vision, and his fingers go lax. As vial after vial is collected.

"Just one... *more*." He hears faintly.

Hyung?

Hyung!

"Hyung?" The voice slowly, becomes more clearer. "Hyung, it's okay, you're okay. Take small sips, okay?"

He feels a straw to his lips, feels some cool on the back of his neck. He obediently drinks, and tastes sugar exploding on his tongue. Something fruity, he opens his eyes blearily, and sees Seungmin

looking down at him worriedly. He realizes he is laying down himself, on the exam table, and when his eyes glance everywhere he finds it's just them.

"You fainted, hyung. I didn't know you were afraid of needles, or blood." Seungmin tells him.

Minho shakes his head against that. "I'm not."

Seungmin's face looks confused, as he tries to get up. "Slowly, hyung, slowly."

He helps him to sit, and Minho feels his head pound slightly, as he looks around the room, inwardly he's taking stock of himself. If anything feels different, or off. If they did anything while he was unconscious, unable to know, unable to defend himself.

"Dr. Seo is vouching for the blood with her lab." Seungmin explains. "You need to rest first, before anything else."

He nods, trying to believe that, trust or not, it's hard to let everything that always happens go. But looking into Seungmin's fierce protective gaze, and all his actions so far, makes it easier. He's just an omega, too, and Minho knows when it comes down to it, it will be himself protecting him with everything he's got, but even at the auction house, omegas always have to look out for each other. There's no one else.

And Seungmin, is different.

He's, *his*.

"I was watching over you, how do you feel now?"

Minho smiles a little, and reaches up, running his hand down Seungmin's hair on instinct alone, as his inner omega claws to the surface to do just that. Watches as Seungmin's eyes widen a little, face confused, and growing from sharp edges to soft corners. "Thank you, my omega, you did well."

Seungmin's gaze flickers, unreadable, but there's something behind that harsh façade, a tenderness that cracks, and then is replaced all

over again.

“Anyone would have done that...” He tries to brush off.

“I’m feeling better.” He assures, before he can ask again.

He thinks of Jisung’s words from earlier, feels them press deeper into his chest. Feels his inner omega responding. Wanting nothing more than to take this burden from the younger, from the way his shoulders tense too much, and the way his scent is so burning under it. He wants to protect him, has to, *needs to*.

His omega.

Mm.

They all are.

“I’ll get Dr. Seo, then.”

-

After many more tests, tests that make him nervous, uncomfortable, and uncertain. Like X-rays, pictures of his body, and scans all over, he’s finally allowed to leave. It must be hours, it feels like a long time, but Seungmin is right there at his side, and doesn’t leave once. He doesn’t even look upset, or angry, or bored. His gaze just continues on Minhoo’s own, and on the other staff every time they approach him. Watching, *them*, instead like hawks.

“I’ll see you back here in a week’s time for the results, okay, Mr. Lee?” Dr. Seo says.

He nods, and Seungmin says, “Thank you, Dr. Seo. We’ll schedule that, if Minhoo-hyung is up for it.”

He’s still not used to that, the strange deference, the way Seungmin always checks with him first. He looks at him now, asking when it’s just them again for a moment in the exam room, “do you want to come back? To see how you’re doing?”

He nods his head quickly, not knowing is worse than doing these

tests at all. If this new pack of his knows, he wants to know too.

“Okay, hyung, let’s schedule that.” Seungmin says, smiling.

They go the reception’s desk to do that, but Minho can’t help but let his eyes wander, gazing across the many faces in the waiting room until his eyes land on Chan. The pack alpha, who still sits there, looking up almost as if he can sense him. Their eyes lock, and Minho feels his ears burn, especially when Chan gives him such an easy, and kind smile. As if it’s nothing to wait here for them, for what? Nearly four hours? As if he’s not angry in the slightest, as if this is a good thing.

“Friday at three work?” The nurse asks.

“Yes.” Minho manages when Seungmin looks at him for an answer.

It’s quickly typed in, and he’s handed a small card with the date and time, and before he knows it they’re next to Chan who stands up, smiling at the both of them. “Everything went well?” He asks.

Minho braces himself for Seungmin to tell him about his fainting, but Seungmin just nods, tight lipped. “More, or less.”

Chan nods, agreeable, his scent of deep wood is not burning in anger, or muted in bitter undertones of something more sharp and dangerous. Instead, it’s a soft node of chopped logs, the press of dew, and moss. Like sinking deeper into a meadow. His pheromones are light and don’t interfere with him in anyway. They say Chan isn’t lying, but it’s hard for Minho to believe it, let alone drop his guard.

“That’s good, I’m glad it went well, *Minho-ah*, let me take you home, okay?” His voice is kind, gentle.

It makes Minho step closer to Seungmin, heart stuttering a little, as he nods, resisting the urge to reach up and grip his collar, tightly in his fingers. Sees the way the alpha’s face shifts, a sad show before he’s smiling again, and they head out together, only this time Seungmin stands in the middle, shielding him from the alpha. Giving him the space he was silently asking for.

In the car, Seungmin sits in the back with him, which helps calm the racing thoughts, and feelings as they take off.

“Did you want to go anywhere, Minho-ssi? Stop anywhere?” Chan asks, as he buckles up.

Minho feels his breath leave him a little. Another trick? Another test?

He shakes his head no in the rearview mirror.

From beside him, Seungmin sighs. “I need a coffee, hyung, let’s stop at that café I like. Drive through though, we’re all tired.”

Minho feels his breath intake sharply again at the casual tone of ordering an alpha around, but Seungmin seems unbothered, and Chan is smiling affectionately as he puts the car in drive. “Sure. Just a coffee?”

“Mm. We’re ordering in later, remember? Oh, and Minho-hyung, we need to get you a phone.” Seungmin continues.

Minho’s heart startles, he dares to whisper in his surprise, “really?” Just for them.

He glances over his shoulder, but Chan doesn’t respond as if he heard him.

Seungmin smiles at him a little pained. “Yes, your own phone. No one else will have access, I give you my word, okay, hyung? Just pick out a good one, and don’t worry about anything else. But first, coffee.” He says with a sigh.

Minho looks at him then, sees the dark circles under his eyes. Remembers Jisung’s words, remembers his career, and everything that must accompany it for an omega. Feels his heart tighten. He doesn’t want to worry him anymore, so he nods, agreeing easily.

“Oh, look, a two for one deal.” Seungmin says when they arrive. “Hyung, do you want my extra drink? Chan-hyung doesn’t have sugar or caffeine this late.”

Chan looks sheepish, as he turns back. "I can't really handle it."

Minho's heart thumps, looking to Seungmin, nodding shortly.

It's almost worth it, to see Seungmin's lips bloom into a larger grin. "How about hot chocolate? Want spiced, regular, or white?"

His thoughts are filled with spice, and the comfort of cloves, so he picks that one, feeling a little silly, but Seungmin just grins. "Chan-hyung, a spiced hot chocolate, and my usual, please."

He doesn't have money, a worried press fills him, but Seungmin, as if reading his mind waves him off as Chan orders. "Chan-hyung won't let me pay either. Always because I'm a student, but now that I'm graduated, and working, even then... ah, he spoils us. But it's also his instincts, you know? Alphas want to provide. Sometimes, I have to let him have his way."

Chan hands them the drinks, and looks very pleased when they take them.

Minho wonders about this with confusion.

He's never met an alpha who derived comfort, or satisfaction, or even pleasure from providing something nice for their omega. It's... foreign. Strange.

He drinks the hot chocolate, and the taste explode son his tongue.

"It's good." He says, without thought, eyes a little wide.

Seungmin laughs, happily, and in the mirror he catches a pleased fond look on Chan's features that makes his heart swoop a little, cheeks burning.

-

The familiar scent of minty citrus is, burning under a new timber of rum, is what gets Minho's attention first. Before even the knocking, or the soft call of his name. He's already out of his bed, walking quickly with his heart hammering in his chest to the door. Breathless as he opens it and comes face to face with Jeongin, *his*

pup.

“Innie.” He says, excited, and so very happy.

It feels like they’ve been separated for years as he takes in the sight of the newly presented alpha at his bedroom door. Tall, smiling slightly, hair in his eyes just a little. He looks practically glowing, carefree, happy. But his eyes look to himself with soft worry, taking in his features. It leaves the omega a little self-conscious, and a lot uncertain.

What if things are different now?

What if he doesn’t like him as much?

“Can you come in?” He asks, hesitantly.

Jeongin’s face looks confused. “What do you mean, hyung? It’s up to you if I can come in.”

“I just thought... your pack alpha... during your rut, they made me go.” He tries to explain the situation, feeling his skin heat at the memory.

He sees the way Jeongin’s lips curl upwards, making his eyes shine, and Minho’s heart skip, then melting into warmth. He looks good, healthier. A little tired from the rut cycle, but mostly vibrant. Different from that place. As if it hardly touched him. He’s grateful for it, so grateful, his chest seizes, and his eyes flicker down only noticing now the plate of food his pup holds.

“Are you going to eat? You shouldn’t let your meals get cold, Innie.” He says, voice tight with worry.

Jeongin shakes his head quickly. “It’s for you, hyung, we uh- weren’t sure if you’d want to join all of us, yet. Plus, you had to go out today, to the doctor, how was it? Did it go okay?”

The words are dripped in concern as Minho nods quickly, heart pounding. He just wants Jeongin to come in. Feels vulnerable at the door, him holding food. Wants him inside, where his scent can press into the room, into the bedding, and linger for hours. Maybe he can

use the blankets for his nest if Jeongin sits down on them. That thought alone makes his mouth water, and his inner omega curl desperately.

“It was fine. Don’t worry about, hyung. Have you been eating? Sleeping?” He continues.

Jeongin’s smile is a little tighter now. “Yes, hyung, it’s just- uh, can I come in? Or we can go to the living room.”

“Yes- no, please, come in, pup.” He says it quickly, moving away, something settling deeply inside when Jeongin steps into his den. When he can shut the door, and have him nice and safe here. Well protected by himself, their scents pressing together helplessly. Attaching into a soft embrace as if they’ve always belonged.

Sees the way Jeongin’s shoulder relax from a tense state, and his eyes droop down as he sits on the bed tiredly.

“Sorry, I should have asked, hyung...” He says.

Minho shakes his head, moves over, sits with him. “Stay. Hyung wants you to stay. I missed you, pup.” His voice cracks a little, he can’t help it.

“I missed you, too...” He says earnestly, then smiles. “Your food, don’t skip meals either, hyung.” Jeongin hands them over, eyes turning a little darker, watching him with instinctual intensity that feels a little too familiar. Feels like, *alpha*. Like when they’d tell him to submit, and present himself for breeding.

But this time, Jeongin is only asking him to eat.

He takes the food, hands shaking just a little. Jeongin’s sudden warmth enveloping them startles him a little, as the alpha looks sheepish, and apologetic. “Sorry, I-” He chuckles nervously, removes his hands. The loss of warmth feels like a punch to the gut. “I’m not very good at this. I lived really isolated with my blood-born pack, until I turned sixteen, and Chan-hyung took me in. That was only, nearly three years ago. The hyungs told me how to- to talk to you, without- without hurting you, but I- I’m not used to it.

Being so careful. I'm sorry."

Confusion fills him first, then a strange feeling in his chest at those words. About the other, 'hyungs,' of Jeongin, and what they could have possibly said to his pup to make him so insecure around him. So careful. How they tried to teach him how to interact with an omega without hurting them, it all feels so strange, and foreign.

"You don't have to be careful with me, Innie, hyung will tell you if you're hurting me, okay?" It feels forbidden to even say such a thing. To mean it, even worse, but Jeongin's eyes light up, and he looks so very relieved, that Minho knows it was the right thing. As long as the others don't find out. "When it's just us, okay?" He continues, hesitant.

Jeongin nods quickly, turning to him, his whole countenance becoming more relaxed. "I'm glad. The thing is, I- I wasn't sure how to talk to you, hyung, after everything. I'm just- I'm so grateful for the way you took care of me. I didn't understand how bad it was until, until after. I want to take care of you, too? Can I?" There are tears gathering in the young alpha's eyes, and it breaks Minho's heart all over again.

He abandons the food next to him on the small table by the bed, and gathers his pup close without thinking. The distance was driving him crazy, and it seems it was driving Jeongin too as he leans into the touch, and whines, turning into a tentative, gentle rumble as they scent each other softly, but urgently, with an underlining madness that speaks of separation, after so many days so close together. That bond is... simmering under the surface. It rises up now.

It comes out in soft notes of yuzu, pressing into Jeongin's skin, along his cheek, at his jaw, down his throat along his scent glands. Feels the young alpha grip him, and let his head fall back in a rare sign of submission, making Minho's heart swoop in his stomach, and then pound loudly in his chest. There's a pull that tightens, his inner omega purring up from below as their arms wrap around, clinging to each other in the aftermath, breathing heavily, all yuzu and minty citrus rum wrap around them.

They're in bed, falling there somehow, holding on tightly, his own face burrowed in Jeongin's skin, along where his neck and throat meet. His pup, clinging just as tightly around his waist, burrowing in below at his own throat, hot breath painting in little pants.

He feels raw, oversensitive, he trembles, feels Jeongin hold him closer, lips along his neck, pressing gently, carefully.

It's overly tender, and almost too much for him to take.

Emotionally, physically, and mentally.

Jeongin's arms curl around him, dragging him in even deeper. "I'll take care of you now, hyung." He says into his skin. "I won't let anyone else hurt you. I'll protect you, *provide* for you. Nobody will hurt you again." The last part is said with a soft protective growl, a possessive certainty that is alphan. Feels the rumble of him, feels his own inner omega responding with a purr threatening, but he doesn't let it out. He can't.

He still can't.

Still, holds back.

His lips press into Jeongin's neck, and his eyes shut, breath shuddering.

-

"If it's cold, I can warm it up." Jeongin's eyes are darkly held on his, the scent of both of them combining thick and heavy in the air.

They're still on the bed, but Jeongin has managed to untangle himself from him, inches apart, thighs touching, arms and hands brushing. Minho can tell the young alpha is trying to hold back. He wants to tell him he doesn't have to, that even if Jeongin, was to try and knot him, push inside, with his throbbing member, that he wouldn't blame him. Not with the lingering arousal in the air, and the clear electricity and tension of a half-formed bond he doesn't dare speak about or mention- but another part of him, is selfishly, more happy this way. For the moment, this different kind of intimacy they've always had, is so special to him.

Just existing, so close, but as if no space exists at all.

“It’s fine, pup.” He assures, and takes a bite.

It’s cold, but the flavours explode on his tongue a little, it’s good. So good. “It’s good.” He compliments.

Jeongin relaxes a little, an easy smile. “We actually ordered in, most of us aren’t great cooks.”

“That can’t be healthy.” He muses, feeling his skin grow hot, and a strike of fear fill him as he realizes the undo criticism in his words, the gentle challenge to the pack alpha. His eyes widen, looking to Jeongin who only chuckles, not sense of anger or worry.

“Yeah, well, we’re trying.” He tells him.

Minho doesn’t like that, in fact, his inner omega rises up against it.

Jeongin just presented, as an alpha, he needs good meals. Healthy, filling meals, and all the strength he can get. But, wouldn’t the pack alpha be angry with him? For trying to cook? For using the kitchen? For implying that he can’t take care of his pack? *Well, he can’t.* His omegas, and his pup, are a good example. Minho wants to hide them away. Feels his skin flush hotly at such possessive, thoughts.

“hyung?” Jeongin says, slowly, carefully. “What is it? You can ask me anything, please? Remember?”

He hesitates, the food turning into concrete sludge down his throat.

“I like cooking.” He finds the courage to say, and braces himself for some kind of impact. Some kind of hurt, or punishment. But he has to, for Jeongin’s sake, for his health. He’ll do anything for what’s, *his*. He’ll protect, nurture, he’ll kill. “Can I?”

Jeongin’s eyes widen, then blink into an easy smile. “Of course. The kitchen is for everyone. You scared me there for a moment.”

He flushes. “Sorry.”

“Eat more, hyung.” Jeongin says, reaching for a piece of chicken

and placing it to his lips.

His skin burns hot as he opens his mouth, and feels the young alpha place it on his tongue, the pads of his fingers are salty, and he tastes those too. His tongue swipes at the food, and licks the alpha's fingers instead.

Jeongin's eyes widen, and his scent turns into a burning rum.
"Uh... I should... I'm..."

Minho ducks his head, he eats silently, feeling guilty, and pleased all at once.

Then even worse.

What is he doing?

"Sorry." He murmurs.

Jeongin shakes his head quickly. "You didn't do anything wrong, I'm just- I just presented and- and you smell really good, hyung. Better with my scent on you."

Minho's heart pounds, blood rushing. *Fuck.*

Jeongin scrambles to his feet, apologetic, saying he needs some air.

Meanwhile, all Minho can see when the door shuts behind him, is his hoodie he left behind, saturated in his scent, citrusy mint, and delicious burning rum. He reaches for it, presses it into his face, his scent glands, breathes shakily, wanting. Comfortingly.

He should give it back, but will Innies really notice?

Quickly, heart in his throat, Minho goes to the bathroom, shuts the door, and opens the other one. The one hiding his small, barely anything nest, and presses the hoodie neatly in a perfect place that seemingly his instincts tell him has been waiting for this for a long time. Something settles even more, and Minho feels a soft purr leave his lips as he curls into the nest, and basks in its comfort, for one tantalizingly delicious moment- where everything almost stops hurting.

But the food isn't finished, and his pup wanted him to eat.

Reluctantly, he gets up, and goes back to the cold dish, eating it quickly, eyes on the door, his mind racing on all the meals he can remember to make, things he needs to cook for his pup. To be healthy, and strong.

And, while he's there, he can cook for his omegas too.

It should be okay, right?

They're, *his*, after all.

It's the pack alpha's own fault for not feeding them well. If he likes takeout so much, he can have it all.

Minho takes another bite, feeling strangely satisfied.

Chapter 7

Notes:

(See the end of the chapter for notes.)

Chapter Text

When he was younger, very small, he remembers his mom. He remembers her kitchen, and how it always used to be steaming, smell warm. There was the scent of herbs, and spices, and rice. It smelled a lot like home, warm, and comforting. Her hands weathered but kind on his face, her eyes shining in the early or late sun, rising or setting. It didn't matter. She always looked her happiest in the kitchen, holding him closely.

It wasn't a big kitchen by any means, nothing like the Bang pack's kitchen he steps into the next day, eyes wide again on all the appliances. State of the art, many not used. No, his mom's kitchen was small, big to him when he was small himself, but small. A few worn pots, an older model rice cooker. Drying her own spices tied up along the top of the pantry. And her pantry, it wasn't just food, there were books. A whole neat line and row of them. All cooking books.

He loved being in the kitchen, taking some, hiding under the table before she got to work. She didn't know he was there- or maybe she pretended not to know as he read about the amazing foods one could make. All the different ingredients, the colors, the tastes he's never had but was always curious for.

She'd catch him late in the afternoon, pretending to be startled, giving him a spoon. *"help me, dear."*

It wasn't until much later, that he began to suspect that maybe she was hiding too.

"Are you sure it's okay, Sungie?" He says, the nickname thick on his tongue, unused but feeling right, maybe too bold.

Jisung's eyes widen, but then soften so prettily. "Call me that again, hyung." He says dreamily. "I like it best when you say it."

His cheeks heat, and he ducks away from the other omega, feeling his heart skip. "I- doesn't your pack call you that?"

"Mm, yes, but it's not the same as my favourite hyung saying it."

"Your favourite?" He questions, gently, a little afraid of what that could mean. If Jisung is serious, of the pack alpha hears such words. Would he be jealous? Vengeful? Would he kick Minho out?

"My one and only Minho-hyung." Jisung says, looking like he's holding himself back from touching him, hugging him, fingers pressed tightly together. "Really, it's okay, hyung. No one cooks much here, anyway, please use whatever you want. We usually do takeout, but uh, Innie let it slip that you wanted to cook and the alphas got a little... *excited*, about that. So, there's plenty of food to work with in the fridge now."

His heart startles a little, eyes, wide looking over to the younger omega with obvious confusion, and slight fear.

Jisung shakes his head quickly, "It's nothing bad. You know, it's just, alphas, they always want to provide, and you've been here almost a week. They want to do more. What I mean, hyung, is we all know you're a little uncomfortable around alphas, so they don't want to overstep, and this- getting food for you, was something they could do. Besides, it's instinct, isn't it?"

He nods, like he understands, when he doesn't.

In his experience, omegas get the scraps, if that at all. Alphas aren't interested in his well-being, just enough to keep him functional. Enough to breed. If he were to carry a pup, maybe they would have treated him better, but all of them got frustrated in the end, when nothing would form in his belly from their constant knotting.

They never stopped trying though.

Why wouldn't they stop!?

“Hyung...? Are you okay?” Jisung asks, slowly, carefully, eyes furrowed in concern. “Honestly, they don’t mind, and no one will bother you while you cook. Seungmin-ah made sure of it. I’ll stay right here with you, okay? I’m just going to sit at the table, and play some games on my phone. Anything else you need, just let me know.”

Jisung waits for a response, and Minho does his best to give it with a small nod. Overwhelmed, it’s hard to speak. Any wrong movement feels like asking for punishment. Especially now that he’s out of ‘his,’ room. In the open, it feels vulnerable. Unsafe.

He shivers, moves further in.

His heart trembles, as he reaches out to the fridge, and opens it.

His eyes widen. Jisung wasn’t kidding.

Every inch is covered in fresh food. Fresh meats, produce, and some pre-packaged things like kimchi, and uncooked rice cakes, and other things. His eyes scan over them a little breathless. Not an inch of the fridge is left empty.

Something wells up, tight, constricting in his chest.

He feels tears, but he pushes them away.

They probably are just excited to have fresh meals, that’s all it is.
Still.

His hands wrap around the pigs feet.

He told Innie off-handed about his favorite food. He never told him how his mom always made it because the butcher and his father exchanged meats, fish and pig. How it was all they at the end of the week for meats, but his mom always made it so delicious, warm, and comforting. The long weeks where his father was gone, and it was just them, she always saved them for a day where they needed it the most. When hiding was too impossible for either of them.

When the landlord would come in, demanding rent from her anyway they could.

They'd eat this after, and she'd apologize. Wet his hair with her tears.

It was a blessing when she died.

He felt guilty for it for so long, how relieved he was.

His hands curl around the meat now. Jokbal shouldn't be so hard, he remembers most of it. His mom made it so many times, and he'd watch sitting on the counter, his hands in the dish bowl too. Sometimes, he'd just had her the spices, and the sauces, and she'd do it all. Even as her hands shook, and her eyes seemed darker, they still shone when they smiled at him. When they ate together, when it was over.

There was a quiet relief in that.

"it's over eomma." He told her over her grave, the silent quiet relief filling the room completely.

Until it didn't anymore.

When he opens the cupboards, he finds everything he needs there too.

But it's not until he's mixing everything together that the tears run down his cheeks. Trying to get in the dish, he snuffles, moves away. Still, tries to keep going.

"hyung?" It's a different voice now, he didn't even notice him come in.

But the scent of pumpkin, and lingering cream is familiar, he startles only for a moment before he can put a name to it. Omegan. Familiar. *Felix*.

He turns, finds Felix standing there, eyes wide as he takes in Minhø's own appearance.

"hyung." Pained now, confused, and uncertain.

Minho turns back, snuffles, wipes it away with his arm. "I'm okay."

He tries. "I'm fine."

Suddenly, he startles again, harder, a jolt as warm arms wrap around him from behind. As Felix clings to him like some sea monster, breath panting into his collar. He gulps, suddenly so warm, freezing as the younger omega sniffles. Crying too.

His heart tightens, the pull tight, inner omega clawing to nurture, help, do something.

"...Felix-ah..." The name feels unfamiliar, but the intention isn't.

"You're not alone, hyung." Felix says, face burrowing into him, scenting him, yuzu pheromones responding. Mixing with pumpkin and cream, and Felix. "I was an entertainer. I mean, I still am, but I was more hardcore back then, and too young." The omega begins explaining, arms so tight, it almost hurts.

But his words hurt more.

Minho's heart aches with something so tender as the trust his omega gives him become unflinching, unapologetic. Raw, and honest. Even though they barely know each other.

"I danced, I sang, I did everything. And then I met this alpha. And he was so nice at first. But then he got mean, and I- I-"

"Hey, shh, hey pup, it's okay." He tries to turn, but his hands are full of raw meat and sauce, and besides, Felix holds him so tightly, stopping him.

"Just let me say this." Felix says, and Minho swears he can hear his heartbeat, loud and fast. "*He broke me.*" His voice cracks. "Mentally, emotionally, literally." Felix's voice shakes. "My back will never be the same. He just was so vicious. It was a minor injury, but my heat hit a- and instead of listening to the d- doctor and going to get the suppressants, he just..."

"Shh, shh, Lix-ah, it's okay, shh, it's over. It's over, pup." He turns nuzzles in, face only, arms still up messy with food, with the remnants of memory.

Felix holds on tighter, sobbing into his chest.

Minho grabs a towel, wipes the mess off as the omega still clings to him. There's nothing he wouldn't do, try to fix, to make his omega stop hurting. To help him, his heart cracking down the middle, shattering, as he holds him, cradles him, fingers now clean curled in his hair, rubbing along his back.

He's not sure how they got here, but he's not going anywhere.

"You're not broken... you're so brave..." He tells him.

A snuffle, then eyes looking at him sharply, wet and omegan soft. "I know." He says, with surety, bravery. "And so are you, hyung."

He startles, as the younger omega leans in, and kisses his lips gently, a barely there thing, before he hugs him again, nuzzling into his throat, his skin, scenting him. It's almost a little desperate, and crazed, but Minho can't find fault in it, or in him, as he tentatively, heart hammering, scents him back. Carefully though, as intimate as it, as much as he wants it, as his inner omegan instincts urge him to, he's still careful. Worried. Doesn't want to hurt him.

"I want to kiss you again, hyung." He sighs, dreamily, all grief seemingly gone now from his tone, fingers curling differently, almost possessively. His scent grows stronger, thicker, Minho feels confused, startled, but he doesn't let it show, just keeps holding him, feels himself shiver as lips press against his throat.

"Why are you so special, hyung?" Felix asks, not in a mean way, just curious, confused. "Why do Seungmin-ah, and Sungie keep you away from us?"

He shudders as the omega kisses him at his pulse point, tongue poking out just a little. A soft swipe, before lips press delicately.

His fingers curl. "Are you... is this...?" *Heat?*

His protective instincts rise up then, arms curling more possessively around the young omega who just sighs, and hugs him closer.

"I'm sorry, hyung, just don't want you to slip away from us."

Minho has no idea what he's talking about.

The pack owns him, he's here for as long as they want, but maybe-maybe the pack alpha has changed his mind. His body tenses, and Felix whines, low and sad. He quickly scents him again, apologetic, comfortingly.

"I'm right here." He says, and at least that part is true, for now. "Hyung's here. I'm making jokbal, would you like to help?"

He tries a distraction, and it seems to work as Felix perks up, looking happy as he moves out of his arms a little.

"Can I?" Felix looks excited, curious, eyeing the food dish behind him now, voice growing a little deeper as he says, "hyung really does know how to cook."

His ears burn a little as he nods, feels the younger omega's arm staying wrapped around him, at his waist, flush against the other.

It's a lot.

But he doesn't hate it.

Felix is just... different.

And he likes it.

He likes that he's not too careful, but his heart still breaks for him. Staring at his pretty features as he looks excited at all the dishes being prepared in front of him. Traces his features with heart wrenching thoughts.

He can't help but ask, even if it causes a punishment, or more pain, "and now?"

"Hm?" Felix looks up.

"Your alphas now?" He clarifies, feeling a little sick at the thought.

Something shifts, and then Felix breaks out into a gooey smile, like warm chocolate chip cookies, so pretty it hurts. "...my alphas are

great... with them I can rest easy... I can also be on top.” He winks, making Minho’s lips part, cheeks burning.

His mind can’t help but go to Jeongin’s rut.

To how Felix straddled him, took his cock, his knot, *on top*.

He thought that was odd, alphas don’t usually allow that.

“Really?” He blurts out, helplessly.

Felix’s face becomes mischievous. “It’s the best position.”

Huh.

What a strange pack.

Suddenly, a voice trying to sound stern, but failing, sounding too adorable, says, “Felix. I was gone five minutes.”

Minho looks, cheeks flaring as Jisung stands there, hands on his hips, cheeks puffed out. Trying to look mad.

His heart kind of soars, feeling all types of soft, and breathless.

Amused curling in as Felix sticks his tongue out. “You need to learn to share, Sungie.”

“We had an understanding.”

“Hyung, doesn’t mind, do you?” Felix’s arm tightens, bringing him dangerously close.

He gulps, turns back to Jisung as the heat from the younger omega becomes almost unbearable, far better than it should be, and shakes his head. “I’m fine. He’s helping.”

“Yeah, see, I’m helping.” Felix chimes.

Jisung huffs. “Children.” And goes back to his game. “Seriously though, hyung, if you want him gone, just say so. I’ll have Chan-hyung wrangle him out of here.”

His heart skips in stone cold fear.

He quickly gulps, shaking his head. “No.” Voice a little harsher then he intends, he winces, tries to backtrack “I mean, it’s fine.”

Both eyes are on him now, more intense, the playful atmosphere dissipating a little. He tries desperately to get it back. “Here, Felix, stir this.”

“Hyung...”

“What are your favorite dishes? Can you tell, hyung?” Minho continues.

Felix watches him for a long moment, before he smiles, brilliantly. Making relief fill him, as Felix latches on, and the conversation flows more easily, and warmer, and playful again. So, achingly good. Anything but alphas, and fear. And, ‘wrangling.’ No one will hurt, *his* omega. Not even arrogant pack alpha Chan.

-

“Can you call Seungmin-ah?” He asks gently, as he places the last dish on the table. His nerves are getting the best of him, Minho can’t help but expect the other shoe to drop. “And Innies-ah?”

Jisung looks up from his game, as Felix’s gaze stays sharp on him from where he rests against the kitchen counter. “Just them, hyung?” Jisung asks, slowly, and carefully, voice free of judgement, a small smile on his lips.

It should be easy, there’s no pressure behind it, but Minho still finds it hard to breathe a little. He swallows around empty air. “If- If the others need to come-” He’ll go. Simple as that, unless he has to be here. Maybe only alphas can eat first. But he was careful, he put food aside for them, still warming on the stove, in the rice cooker. He wrings his hands.

“They don’t.” Felix says, voice just as sharp as his gaze. “They can eat later. They’re not animals.” Something in the way he says it, is comforting. Or maybe, it’s knowing Felix’s history, the limited, short preview of it. Somehow, it helps.

He nods, something settling.

“They’ll be here soon.” Jisung says, turning his phone off to grab the dishes, spreading them out more.

It doesn’t take long before Seungmin comes in, dark circles under his eyes, yawning, making Minho’s heart drop a little. “Are you okay, Seungmin-ah?”

The omega stops, blinks, smiles a little sheepish. “Got this deposition to prepare for. I’m fine, hyung, smells-”

“Like the best thing I’ll ever taste.” Jeongin says, stepping in, finishing the sentence with a crooked grin, and an excited gleam in his eyes.

It’s contagious, infectious, Minho realizes too late how much he’s smiling, when he sees the way all his omegas are staring at him. His scent of yuzu, sweet in the air. He swallows thickly, feeling a little embarrassed for his display of emotion, and says, “let’s eat.”

They all sit down at the table, dishes being filled at will, rice a good helping in each bowl, he makes sure. His inner omega settling, pleased, purring inwardly in pleasure.

Despite the easy conversation, and the flow of warmth, and the way it feels so complete, and good... there’s still three chairs that are empty. Noticeably. He can’t help but feel his eyes draw to them, gulping down some juice.

He feels warmth, hair tickling at his ear, and soft whisper from Felix of, “don’t worry... at the moment, they’re *very*, occupied. Hyunjin’s rut hit this morning.”

His heart stills, eyes widening, as he looks to the omega, mouth opening and closing, cheeks burning. “And you’re... all here?” He asks, confused.

Felix frowns a little, then grins. “Trust me, Hyunjin’s very happy with the arrangement at the moment.”

He gulps. “But...?”

“Hm?”

“Doesn’t he need an omega... to fulfill, him?” Minho’s cheeks burn, feeling a little dizzy at the slow gradual understanding of what Felix is telling him.

The younger omega’s eyes furrow, then his face smirks into little mischievousness. “Hyunjin likes it when Chan takes care of him, and really who wouldn’t? A service top I tell you, through and through.”

Minho feels like he’s going to pass out with all this information, most of it he’s not quite certain about.

“Um...” He murmurs, feeling heat stir in his gut.

“Hey! Felix-ah, you better not be telling Minho any embarrassing stories!” Jisung calls.

Felix grins, cat-like, a little feral. “Well, not exactly. He was just curious about what the others are doing.”

At this, Seungmin groans, and Jeongin’s whole face turns red, right down his throat to under his shirt.

Minho watches appreciatively, suddenly feeling like maybe it’s too hot in here. His scent turning too sweet now. He tries to stop it, reign it in, but it’s hard. Difficult. Why this is affecting him so much?

Quickly, he gulps, and stands up. “I’ll make something easy for them to digest, then.” He turns to go back to the kitchen, feels pairs of eyes on him as he does so.

Hears the barely disguised whispers as Jisung lightly slaps Felix, “why’d you do that?”

“What!?”

Seungmin sighs. “We said...” Then, quieter, just a whispered thing, “*give him time.*”

“He’s not a child.” Felix protests. “Or some broken doll. He deserves to be talked to like a person. Of all the people who would understand that, Minnie...”

“Don’t Minnie, me. You have no idea what it’s like.”

“Me? I don’t?”

“Okay, *enough*.” He growls, a soft warning as he turns back to the group of omegas, and his pup.

They all still, wide eyed looking at him.

Minho feels his ears burn, he swallows thickly, tries to get this out. “I’m not broken, Felix is right. And yes, Seungmin you’re right too, some things are hard, but I want to try so they can be easier. There’s a lot... I don’t know, or understand, and I don’t want to make it difficult for you all, so just tell me if there’s something I need to know, okay? But if- if the rest are uncomfortable with me knowing things like... personal stuff, ruts and heats, then- then, you shouldn’t tell me.” *If it’s not my business, not my place.*

Silence, then slowly, Seungmin nods. “Okay, hyung.”

The others nod too, even Jeongin who has rice stuck to his lip cutely.

Minho feels a smile stirring despite himself. “Sorry.” He feels the need to say.

Everyone protests vehemently.

He smiles, shyly. “I’ll finish making these snacks for the others, you guys eat more, okay? I’ll leave leftovers in the fridge, warm them up when you’re hungry, or- or you can come and find me, okay?”

They all nod, obediently.

It feels strange... as they all stare him... he feels protective, nurturing, warm towards them. Feels like a little bit of a surge of something he can’t explain, only knowing his inner omega feels strong, stronger than ever. Sturdy, perhaps is the better word to

describe how it grows inside him, like iron plating that's somehow soft underneath.

"Did you get enough, hyung?" Jeongin asks, worriedly.

He smiles, and nods.

He didn't eat a lot, but he can't stomach it anyway. Besides, he needs to make sure his omegas, and pup have enough. And the alphas, and beta too. He can sneak down later and have more when they've all had their fill. If there's anything left. He doesn't mind. Even the amount he had, was far more, and filling than he's had in years.

-

He throws it all up.

Shaky, gasping, tears in his eyes in the bathroom later. His hands tremble, he feels sick even after expelling it all.

He leans back, sitting, trembling on the bathroom floor. He wipes his mouth with tissue, shakily gets to the sink, hauls himself up, wipes his face. Wipes it all away, breathing heavily, he looks up into the mirror. To bloodshot eyes, and cracked lips.

He looks terrible.

He's always looked terrible, but now he really can see it.

The years of neglect, abuse, the lack of food. The being bred more than he can take. *The loss*. The empty feeling. The numbness that always spreads.

His phone rings then, startling him.

He swallows, nervous, afraid.

Chan gave him this phone, the pack alpha. He said it had all the pack's numbers programmed in, and to call, or text them as much as he wants. That he can call anyone he wants, go on online, whatever he needs. It felt like a test, and when he's unsure in that

way, he always does the safest course of action, which is to do nothing.

Now, he gulps thickly, and wonders if there was a more sinister, deeper reason for giving him a phone.

Is Chan calling him for, something? *That?*

He shakily reaches for it, and feels the relief so visceral he almost falls over. It's an unknown number, he picks it up, unsure if could be the pack or not.

"Hello?"

"Mr. Lee Minho-ssi? This is Dr. Seo. I know you've booked an appointment for Wednesday, but I got your results back, and I think it's important that I see you earlier. Could you come in tomorrow at nine?"
Dr. Seo, her voice is familiar, it wraps around him.

He breathes, a little uncertain. "Can I call you back?" He says, as bravely as possible, reminding himself that she's an omega too.

"Of course. Please call me back as soon as possible at this number."

He hangs up, heart flipping violently.

What could that possibly mean?

And what will the pack alpha say? Should he even tell him? He probably doesn't want to be inconvenienced again. But, if he doesn't mention it and he finds out later, he could be in a lot of trouble.

He should talk to Seungmin, but his face was so tired, he needs rest.

Biting his lip nervously, Minho decides to tell Jisung, he'll know what to do.

Why the doctor wants to see him so quickly, only time will tell, but he knows it can't be good. It never is. But, he can't help but wonder, heart pained, inner omega whining, just, how defective he

could be?

And will this be the final straw? Will Chan kick him out?

-

In the end, Jisung was concerned, but said they'd go when he finally worked up the courage to tell him, playing it safe, he hopes.

It's a whole night of worrying, sweaty, unable to sleep.

In the morning, surprisingly, Chan is there again, and so is Seungmin. Who looks a little better, but his eyes narrow in on Minhoo's own tired features, asking, "did you even sleep, hyung?"

Minho gulps, shakes his head when Chan isn't looking.

Seungmin's face contorts, but he nods stiffly. "Do you want me to come in with you this time?"

His breath catches, he looks to the mirror of the car where Chan drives, but sees no reaction from him. No orders, he looks to Seungmin who looks frustrated again, angry, looking from Chan to himself with terrible understanding.

"Please." He says, quickly, before Seungmin can say anything. "Don't fight."

Seungmin breathes deeply, but nods.

Soon, they get to the doctor's office, and he's ushered in right away. No waiting, just back in that exam room with Seungmin by his side. His stomach empty, aching for food he couldn't swallow, couldn't eat, couldn't stomach. Just a bit of fruit, but it was hardly anything. Yet, he couldn't help it, the not eating. Doesn't want to be sick again.

"Mr. Lee, I'm so glad to see you, thank you for coming on such short notice." Dr. Seo says, files and papers in hand as she sits down a comfortable distance from him.

Next to him Seungmin tenses, the scent of clove becomes painfully

spicier in fear, and nervousness.

Dr. Seo looks from the younger omega back to himself. "Would you like Seungmin to go?"

He shakes his head quickly, wants him to stay. Too tired, exhausted, and hungry to fight against his warring thoughts of which option is the right one. That will protect them from punishment, and more pain.

Dr. Seo nods, and says with eyes more sympathetic, and hurt then Minho was expecting, "Mr. Lee-ssi, you must have been hurting for a long time."

As if hearing her words, his wrist, throbs faintly, his other hand, an echo of the light snowfall from last night, heart stopping a little.

"I called you in here so quickly, because you don't deserve to hurt a second more. Let's get you better, okay?" She continues.

Minho is left, frozen, a lump growing in his throat. Emotions warring inside to get out, inner omega going crazed. Heart pounding, his own fear bitter to the taste.

From next to him, Seungmin becomes as tense as a statue. "How much, exactly, is hyung hurting?" Words like razor sharp cuts.

"Mr. Lee-ssi, you have some severe chronic injuries that have not healed properly, and advanced malnutrition that needs addressing. And then there is of course the problem with the birth control implant. We need to remove it immediately." Dr. Seo continues.

Minho can't breathe, his head fills with cotton, he can only nod dumbly, then pause, feeling uncertain. "Implant?"

Dr. Seo's eyes shift, something like realization there, as Seungmin's breath inhales sharply. "Yes, this is why you haven't conceived in so many years."

His heart crushes a little, and the emotion becomes too much, even as he feels numb to it. Silent tears begin to fall, his hands shake, his scent a mess. The whole world turns to a watercolor painting.

Voice cracked, he asks, unable to finish the question, "I thought... So, I- I'm... not...?" *That's what that alpha meant.*

And he agreed, so easily.

Just- wanted it to stop.

"hyung!"

Clove becomes soothing, targeted, he can barely smell it at all. The world caves in. His world. Imploding into something he never knew it was.

He can't breathe.

The world is dark, until the familiar woodsy scent fills him so completely. Until a hand presses into the back of his neck, and a soft rumble of, "I've got you, omega." Fills him so completely.

It should be terrifying, and it is.

And yet, it's also comforting. *It could be safe.* (but it never is). It's survival. He clings.

He loses himself almost completely into the alpha's embrace. He gulps in the scent headily, desperately. His omega whines, a low guttural thing in this throat that echoes. Hears *his* omega gasp. Feels a hand press into his hair.

Feels himself drift.

Notes:

let me know your thoughts/characters you'd like to see more interact with minho. <3

Chapter 8

Notes:

this chapter got away from me again, who's surprised, not me anymore.
very important though!! new tags have been added, please read them. there are very graphic scenes in this chapter of minho's past abuse/traumas. if you're uncomfortable, and want to skip, feel free to hmu on tumblr for a simple reacp instead.

<3

Chapter Text

He comes to a little startled, movements caged and fluttered, he can only do so much as he gasps. The air he takes in is familiar, the scent presses down his throat thickly into his lungs, along his scent glands so heavily he doesn't know where his own scent begins and the others' end. It's, *pack*, the scent he knows intimately well now. Interwoven everywhere in the house of the Bang pack he's staying with. But above it is a deep woodsy scent, and then even stronger, clove and spice, and Seungmin.

He presses into it, turning into his warmth, his skin, greedily taking mouthfuls at his throat. The jasmine is here too, but a little less, as if the source isn't here, just the lingering effects. As if Jisung disappeared not long ago.

"Shh, it's okay, hyung, it's just me. Just us." Seungmin's voice trembles a little, and then grows stronger.

Minho can feel him, everywhere, the softness with which they're laying on, the clothing, the blankets, the pillows, *nest*.

He panics only for a moment, stilling tightly, before he realizes it's not his nest. Too big, too many items. Not his. His is safe. This is, cozier, bigger, but more contained. More of an ordinance to it. His inner omega, and his instincts screaming it must be Seungmin's

without even knowing for sure yet. He just knows. Omegan, deep.

“We’re home, and you’re in my nest, and you’re safe, hyung.” Seungmin murmurs. “It’s just us right now, but Jisung was here earlier. He left to get some food, I think maybe that’s why you woke up so harshly, I’m sorry. Please drink some water. Even if you don’t feel like it.”

Untangled just a little, even as he whines without meaning to against it, skin hot, but Seungmin doesn’t scold him, make fun of him. No one is getting angry. Just a straw pressed to his lips. He drinks, doesn’t realize how thirsty he is until he’s sucking in air.

“Good, good.” Seungmin says, taking the drink back, hand along his back, warm and anchoring.

Once he calms down a little, breathing easier, he realizes he can hear Seungmin’s heart under his ear, and moves up, back, putting a little space between them so he can see his face. It’s strained, worried, but smile small when they’re eyes lock.

“Hey.” Seungmin says, gently. “hyung.”

His voice feels rough, like maybe he was screaming, but Minho is too afraid to ask. He gulps, remembers what happened before he... *dropped*, so hard and so fast he thought he was dying. Remembers Dr. Seo, and the appointment, and the truth.

“What... uh, what happened?” Fear grips him, he can’t help it. Unconscious is vulnerability, anything could have happened to him.

Seungmin’s face hardens just a little. “Chan broke into the exam room. He heard your sounds of distress, and thinking with his knot instead of his head-”

“Now, Minnie, you know that’s not fair.” Jisung’s voice breaks through.

Minho turns a little startled, but doesn’t let go of the other omega, and the younger omega doesn’t let go of him. If anything, his grip tightens, a soft growl, protective and visceral, before Seungmin retracts his teeth, and looks apologetic to Jisung who seems mostly

endeared. "Sorry." Seungmin mumbles.

Jisung huffs a quiet bit of laughter. "It's fine. Hyung, I'm glad you're awake. I brought food. Some brownies, Lixie made them."

"Really?" He can't help but ask, eyes beginning to slowly make out the room a little, from where eye's half-turned to it. The food, the furniture, and the way Jisung hovers above the bed, *nest*, giving them space and distance.

"Lix-ah loves baking." Seungmin fills him in. "Too much, sometimes."

Jisung's face grows softer and more amused. "Don't ask him to cook, but baking, sometimes we just live off that."

Minho feels a soft protective growl of his own, instincts rising up and warring against this truth. He cooked for them, and he'll cook again for them. They need to eat, proper food, not just sweets. "I'll make something else soon." He says.

Both of them make sounds of protest. "No, hyung, not yet, just rest, okay? Your leftovers are still making the rounds." Jisung assures. "Besides, after uh, a drop, sweets are the best for omegas." He nods, assuredly.

Minho gulps, and nods, not wanting to argue, make things worse.

"Do you want me to stay, hyung? I'll just sit over here and do my crocheting, if you don't mind." Jisung says, soft nodes of jasmine washing over him. It has a cooling effect, feels nice.

He doesn't want him to go, nods a little.

Jisung makes himself comfortable on an armchair in the corner of the room, crochet project in hand. Seungmin's gentle, but firm, and he pulls him back to himself, telling him, "you need more scenting, more touch. And, as I was saying... Chan did hug you, and scent you. He was only trying to calm you down, *however*, I know you don't like alphas close and so does he. And he didn't have your consent to do that. He'll apologize later, when you're feeling better."

His skin crawls a little, heart jumping, the alpha? Pack alpha? Apologizing to himself? An omega. It's all wrong.

He shakes his head. "It's okay." He doesn't want to hurt anymore.

Minho realizes too late that he's trembling, when Seungmin's hand begins to rub along his back after a short pause, seemingly taking this in. "Maybe it's time I was a little more honest with you, hyung."

Minho's heart pauses a little, breathless, is Seungmin saying he lied? He waits with bated breath.

Eventually, Seungmin sighs gently, and says, "Sungie-hyung is right, Chan-hyung isn't that bad."

A little huff from the corner of the room, from the other omega, but Seungmin doesn't let that deter him.

"He's a good alpha." Seungmin corrects. "A good pack alpha. So is Hyunjin, a good alpha, I mean. Everyone here respects each other's boundaries. We approach pack decisions together, the alphas are no more important than the omegas here, nor is the beta. I thought if we showed you that, it would be the easiest way for you to believe us. But, maybe I should say it also. *Not another word Han.*"

Jisung is quiet, just the sound of his crochet hook, and the subtle movement of yarn. A little hum, but nothing vicious or pointed. Just acknowledgement, and some relief.

Minho for his part, feels his heart pitter-patter like gentle rain turning silently into a storm, loud before anyone realizes it.

He trusts Seungmin, for some reason, somehow, he really does.

But these words are hard to believe.

"We'll show you, hyung, we'll keep showing you." Seungmin continues. "So, it's okay if you don't believe me yet, but it's true. And this pack, I speak for us all, when I say we really want you to stay for as long as you're willing."

What does that even mean? He's theirs... Isn't he?

Seungmin doesn't say anything after that, just hugs him closer, rubbing along his back, leaving just a bit of space between them that Minho is grateful for. It's almost too much, feels a little nauseous from it, wants more. Skin crawling, but heart settling. Inner omega pleased, but uncertain and a little distressed. It wars.

He swallows around the sudden lump and asks, "what happened after... the alpha...?"

Seungmin hums. "I got to you, helped you down, and we brought you back. Dr. Seo left all the information for you on your medical conditions in a folder. Nobody has looked at it, I promise, hyung. It's your business, your autonomy now. You can call her anytime to discuss things. But if you need help, please let us any of us know, if you'd let us, we really want to help you."

Minho nods, but he can't help but wonder if Chan agrees with this.

He remembers how he acted last time, arguing with Seungmin about his approach. The contention between them turning volatile. Angry. He still flinches a little at the memory, and feels his protective instincts from his inner omega rise up quite severely, until he's almost sick with it. No one will hurt *his* omegas. His pup.

"And, hyung?" Seungmin says, carefully, which is so unlike him, Minho's heart startles again.

"Yes?"

"If there's anything you want to talk about with us, anything you need to say, we'll listen. It won't go outside this room. Not unless you would like it too."

It's an invitation, careful, tentative, and filled with concern. He can hear it in the way Seungmin's voice shakes a little, the way he suddenly sounds so young. He doesn't want to burden him, not sure if he can say it. If he should. Would it even matter? It's over now, he's fine. He'll have to call Dr. Seo, get it removed. It seemed important.

Or, maybe she did it while he was unconscious.

But Seungmin never mentioned it.

"I..." He stops himself.

"You can ask us anything, hyung." Jisung pipes up, gently.

He stills a little, and then exhales deeply. "You don't have to answer."

"What is it?" Seungmin continues for Jisung.

Minho feels his heart pick up again. "You're such a big pack, I was just wondering, why you didn't have any pups yet?" *Aside from Innie*. But that's not exactly what they're talking about here, what he's asking.

The sudden inhale, and tension in the room tells Minho that they know this, that they understood him perfectly.

"You don't have to... I'm sorry, I shouldn't have- asked that." He tries.

Seungmin's hand rubbing along his back, stops, then continues. "It's fine. It's nothing too deep, really. I don't want kids. Felix doesn't either, but he can't really have any anymore, even if he wanted to. And JIsung-hyung..."

"I want them." Jisung confirms, voice a little shy. "But, it's complicated for me."

"How so?" He turns a little, and sees with his heart thumping violently, tears in the younger omega's eyes.

He wastes no time, reaching out, "come here." Deep and commanding. Not sure where that sudden authoritative tone comes from, but Jisung is already running over, and slipping into the nest, joining them after Seungmin nods his own consent.

He burrows in behind Minho, clinging to his back, until he himself is pressed into the middle.

He breathes, it's almost suffocating, bad and good. He craves it, isn't used to it. So sick with desire.

Feels the omega snuffle, he grips his hands.

Seungmin continues, "Do you want me to explain it?"

Jisung hums, burrows in deeper, and Minho in turn lets out his own soothing scent of yuzu, light and comforting.

"Well, basically, Jisung really likes his job, if he were to give birth, the laws aren't so great for him. He'd probably be demoted, and forced to take more time off. Sometimes fired, and then it takes twice as long to get his career up and running again, after the new laws were implemented."

"New laws?" He questions, feeling a little light-headed.

"Yeah." Seungmin says, voice hard. "They really want to up the fertility rates, so they're forcing omegas to take three years off."

"Well, it's more of an incentive." Jisung tries.

"It should be a choice then." Seungmin argues back.

Jisung doesn't say anything to that, just says, "I still want to, just not right now. Or, I don't know."

"And when you say you don't want kids...?" Minho feels the need to ask, confused by this.

Seungmin nods. "Of course I'd want my packs kids, just not my own. I'd make a great uncle though, teach the kid not to let people walk all over them, you know?"

He looks happy at the thought, brimming gently in his eyes.

Looking to Jisung, he's looking at Seungmin with the most loving expression, *in love*, dreaming. Wanting. It's deep, it's a lot. Abiding and lingering, and maybe he realizes he shouldn't be laying in the middle of them.

There were omegas he met in the auction house like this, or at his owners. Falling in love, with each other. It was dangerous, and stupid, but helpless.

The scents are strong, echoing their deep feelings.

Minho could drown in it, likes it too much. Feels, briefly, a tightening in his chest, a pull, wondering what it would be like if he could ever be like that.

He gulps. "What about your pack alpha?"

It breaks the tension and moment a little, Seungmin laughs dryly, "what? Are they the ones going to carry a pup inside them for ten months, and then have to go through all that shit? Who cares." He dismisses.

Jisung huffs a little. "Don't listen to Minnie, we make decisions together, *remember*? Anyway, Chan-hyung really likes kids. He'd excited for the one day, you know? And I know Hyunjin secretly adores Changbin's nephew too much. Changbin is really open to it too. And Innies, I don't know, he's still young, that was also a factor. He hadn't presented for a while, so..."

Huh.

"How old is he?" Minho can't help but ask.

"Nineteen."

"Nineteen."

The two omegas say together, then Jisung, "you didn't know?"

He shakes his head, feels his skin flush. "We talked about other things."

Numbers didn't matter there, only survival, only good memories. Anything but to think about the horrors surrounding them. The scary movies inside his eyelids.

"Well, the main thing is that we're all happy, pups or not." Jisung

says, with maturity, hugging them both closer, so warm. Almost hot.

Minho makes a sound of agreement, and then says, eyes drifting closed as exhaustion creeps up. "Me too. Even though I lost him, I have Innies now."

Feels the two omegas tense next to him, arms still wrapped around, but not moving. So, very still.

It makes him panic a little, eyes wide, exhaustion being pushed aside. "Sorry. I didn't."

"No." Seungmin says, voice short, breathless.

"No, hyung, it's okay, shh, it's okay." Jisung assures, hand finding his, squeezing warmly.

Seungmin tightens his hold. "Don't apologize." Voice thick.

"If you want to tell us, we're here, okay?" Jisung says, voice sadder but sure.

"But if not, we're still here. We're not going anywhere, hyung." Seungmin's voice, strong, sturdy, and confident.

So much so, that Minho believes him. Completely, without thought.

"I was sixteen." He recounts, before he can even really think about it. "It was the second time I was sold."

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"Second times the charm." The alpha tells him, looking him up, and down as he leads him forcefully out of the cage at the auction house. He's just been sold again, trembling slightly as the heavy metal collar seems to tighten even more at those words as he's dragged out. He's taken to the side door where his new owners come to pick him up.

He doesn't expect the hard-edged female alpha, eyebrows

manicured, nails just so. She smiles a little, heavy makeup, in her fifties or sixties, and says plainly to him, “you’re to be my son’s omega.” She then looks to the other alpha’s with that cold expression and hands over a bag.

The collar unlocks, and quickly is replaced by broader hands, and hard leather.

“You’ll wear our pack collar for now. He’ll replace it with his own when its time. Follow me, keep your head down, understand?” She says. “I won’t tolerate disrespect.”

One of the guards shoves him a little, Minho gulps, hands shaking. “Yes, head alpha.”

“Good.”

He’s brought inside the back of the car, keeping his head down as she sits next to him. The driver takes off, and the trip is long, but not arduous. He doesn’t dare look up, but the feel of the son on his face makes him almost whimper in appreciation, and relief.

He was only in the dark at the last place.

“My son needs an heir.” She tells him. “He will breed you, and you will provide one. This means you cannot be shared, do you understand?”

He nods. “Yes, head alpha.”

She turns back to her phone, before they make it to the large house on the outskirts of town. There’s forest everywhere, and the air is cleaner than the city. He can feel the wind on his face as he’s guided by a beta servant inside.

He wonders why they would buy him for such a job as precious as producing an heir. Surely someone with this kind of money could find a well-bred omega in polite society to do it. But he doesn’t question further, just keeps his head down, goes where directed.

He’s sent to a room downstairs, but thankfully, this one has a small window, bars on it, but light is coming in. It’s nice, and warm, and

even as he feels the tears spill over his cheeks, it could be worse. It's comfortable at least, bigger than any bedroom he's ever had, his own bathroom, too. Just that there's a lock on the door, and no way to escape.

"The first master will be here shortly." The beta tells him head lowered. "Please bathe and prepare yourself."

Minho does as he's told.

As soon as the door is shut, and locked.

There are clothes for him, and the shower is nice, and hot. And it feels good to finally get the blood and alpha's cum off of him.

He's still sore, tired, and terrified, but he feels a little better as he sits on the bed.

These people seem... nicer. Less angry, than the alpha before.

Almost, like this is a business arrangement.

Maybe it won't be so bad.

The door bursts open, and an alpha steps in, his face looks upset. But he doesn't take it out on Minho, as he flinches, eyes tight, body tense, expecting the worse. Instead, the alpha apologize, "shit, no. I didn't mean... look it's not you, okay?"

Slowly, Minho opens his eyes, looks to the alpha who is crouched a little, pleading, hands held out. "I just, I didn't ask for this either." He says, eyes earnest.

He has a nice face, older than himself, late twenties, thirties. He's handsome, and he smiles gently.

Minho's heart pounds, but he slowly, tries to force himself to relax. "Greetings, alpha." Eyes turned down.

The alpha sighs. "Just... here, let's get you into something more comfortable."

Minho flinches, and the alpha looks sadder, but he continues reaching for him, unhooking the leather collar with quick deft hands, barely touching him. He replaces it with another, lighter, more comfortable to sleep in. Minho realizes too late that he forgot to bare his throat, *to submit*, he tries to now, and the alpha sucks in a quick breath.

“Please, don’t, I’m not- look, if I tell you something, it has to stay between us, okay?” He says, breathless, pleading.

Minho looks up, sees it in his features.

He doesn’t even know his name.

He nods, anyway. He has to listen.

Just long enough until he can find a way out.

The other place he was chained, here he can move freely, enough to run. He just needs an opportunity. Those bars are tight, but whoever holds the key to the room, if he can get them inside while it’s open, and blindside them... maybe not the alpha, maybe that beta, when he comes back...

“I actually, don’t like omegas.” The alpha says, coughing slightly. “My mother hates this. I can’t even mate the omega she picked for me. Especially not now that I love another. That’s why you’re here. So, if you just pretend that I do this to you, she’ll leave me alone, and I’ll leave you alone, okay?”

Minho looks at the alpha warily, but nods, slow and deliberate.

“Yes, alpha.” He says, but his eyes are burning into the other. “... but if you don’t want this, can’t you let me go?” He has to ask.

The alpha looks a little frustrated, then says, with a tight smile, “once you don’t get pregnant, she’ll have no choice but to let us both go, okay?”

Minho holds onto that, even while he plans his own forms of escape, nodding. “Okay.”

The alpha sighs, relieved. “Good, I brought you food. If there’s anything else you need, just ask me, okay? I’ll have to come here once a day, anyway... or every second if I can help it, just let me know.”

“Alpha?”

“Hm?”

“What’s your name?”

The alpha startles a little, smiles tightly. “Just call me Choi, okay?”

He doesn’t ask for Minh’s name, so he doesn’t give it, not sure how to feel about that, other than wary.

The food he brings is good.

Minh hasn’t eaten in days.

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It goes on like this for a few weeks. Alpha Choi comes almost everyday. They don’t really speak much, he just brings him food, or books, or music, mostly anything he asks for within reason. They pretend that they’re mating, when they haven’t even touch once since he got a new collar on. It’s all perfectly fine, and yet Minh has yet to find an opportunity to run. He might have only one chance, he needs to make the most of it.

Secretly, he’s been making a map, of the only entrance and therefore exit he knows. The path from the front door that brought him down into the basement.

If he can overpower the alpha when he’s in here, then maybe he can grab the key, and run.

But how?

Alphas are much stronger, and he’s too weak from lack of food, he learned this the hard way. So, he builds up his strength, asks for extra food, works out in the bedroom where he can, however he

can. Tries to get strong, prepared. He can do this.

But then, it all come to head one day, before he gets the chance.

The door bangs open rather loudly, and Minho gets off the bed, standing up as his heart hammers, eyes wide when two figures come into the room. Alpha Choi, and another alpha, younger, but with similar features, clearly related.

Alpha Choi looks panicked though, coming up to Minho, gripping his arms when he's never touched him before until now.

"...alpha?" He asks, carefully.

"Omega, I- I need you, o- okay? My lover, the beta servant who always helps you, my mother is going to kill if I don't- if we don't mate properly." Alpha Choi is crying, desperate, his fingers curl tightly.

Minho feels a sick dread filling him.

This is horrible, but it doesn't explain the alpha behind him.

"Can't we pretend, like always?" He asks naively.

Alpha Choi's face does something funny, then gravelly, pained about his lover, tells him, "she's going to check. *After.*"

Minho's skin runs cold.

"M- My dongsaeng is going to help us, okay? J- Just close your eyes, and then it will be over. You can do this for me, can't you, omega? My omega? After, we can both be free." He explains it like its rational, as if he has a choice.

Minho looks to the door, wanting to flee.

He should have tried earlier.

One alpha, is better than two.

He looks back to alpha Choi, and nods, can feel his brother's eyes

on him.

“hyung, this is-” The younger alpha says.

“Shut up.” Alpha Choi snaps, looking back to the younger alpha. “Or do you want me to disown you when I take over? We both know mom doesn’t have long.”

The younger alpha gulps, but nods.

Alpha Choi steps back, into the corner of the room, chest heaving. “Hurry up... fuck, Yejoon doesn’t have long.”

Minho looks to the other alpha, who seems uncomfortable, not wanting to do this, but he does it anyway. He steps closer, and out of instinct, Minho steps back, sharply. But the back of his legs hit the bed.

“At least, go into the bathroom, or something, hyung.” The younger alpha says.

“No.” Alpha Choi growls. “I need to be sure.”

The younger alpha turns back to Minho then, face apologetic, hands tentative, as they cup his young face. “I’ll be gentle, okay? Don’t worry, just look at me. What’s your name, omega?”

“...K- Know.” He says, voice thick.

Minho, echoes faintly, but he can’t.

“Lee Know.”

“Okay, Know-ah, I’ll be quick, okay? You can close your eyes if you want. My name is Choi Hwan. Just Hwan, is fine too, okay?”

He nods shakily, and closes his eyes.

Just like before.

But he doesn’t expect the way lips brush against his, the way his cheeks burn as his eyes snap open. The alpha is kissing him,

coaxing his lips open, making a sound build inside, he tries to tamper down. Feels his strong arms pick him up, push him into the bed, moving all over him.

He's never felt like this.

Hot, excited.

It burns.

Feels his cock thicken, and his ass become wet.

The alpha kisses him again, and he moans, can't help it, feels hands going lower. Forgets the whole world, as the pleasure builds.

He's so careful, nice.

He can't make sense of it.

It always hurt.

And it still does, just in a different place, between a different cage inside.

Minho gasps, when two fingers become three inside him, when he hits something, when his lips wrap wetly around his cock, when it feels, *good*.

He's embarrassed, and ashamed with how it feels. Doesn't want it, never asked for it, and yet it feels almost nice. He feels almost wanted. His omega satisfied, even if he's inwardly fighting at the same time, caught between instinct and reality.

"Shh, Lee Know, I've got you." He whispers, hot press of lips at his ear, pushing inside him. *full*.

He almost wants it to hurt. Hurt more than this.

It doesn't, it builds, until he can't contain himself, until he's making noises he feels ashamed are even coming out.

So lost in it, he forgets why they're like this, how he just used him,

the fact that his brother watches them intently.

-

Their mom comes and checks.

Her eyes are dark, it's just them.

This would be a good time to try, to escape. She's smaller, alpha or not, strong or not, she has a female frame. Minho knows he can do it. But his legs won't cooperate. They're like jelly, and his inner omega is purring silently, just as much as it claws against.

"On your knees, *present*." Her tone is dominance, alphan, full of authority.

And Minho, he's floating, high somewhere.

His body moves without thought.

He tries to fight against it, to hit her, get out- he can't.

He's stuck.

He presents himself, feels slick and cum run down his thighs. Face burning with humiliation as she leans in and looks. Hands spreading his ass, checking if he was truly bred or not.

She hums. "Good."

Her burning touch is gone, heels clicking, door shutting, locking.

It has a terrible air of finality to it.

He stays like that for so long, can't move, paralyzed.

Eventually, the floating feeling wanes, like sticky syrup dripping off. He can move, lay down, curl into a ball, and let the tears coat him.

-

He's not sure why, but Hwan comes back.

He hugs him, shushes him, tells him he's sorry. "You were so good, my omega, so good."

And Minho can only whimper faintly, pushing into that comfort he desperately needs, even if he wants to fight against it.

Even if he hates, *hates him*- hates all of this. He can't, it's as if his body needs it, his inner omega craves it- in anyway he can get.

When his heat comes, alpha Choi pretends to come down, but he doesn't touch him, in fact his eyes look at him betrayed, disgusted.

It makes Minho afraid.

But then, Hwan comes, and everything is a little bit better. He forgets everything else, especially the hateful look.

But the feeling, the pain in his chest doesn't let up.

-

Eventually, his chance comes.

But he feels... strangely conflicted.

That dies away when the nausea starts. When his chest become tender, and he grows more tired. Sleeping a lot, small backache. He knows the signs. His mother had them before her miscarriage. His baby brother who never made it.

That won't happen again.

He gets everything prepared. As he waits for when the beta will bring him his food, and not alpha Choi.

A few weeks after his heat, it happens.

The beta comes in, and Minho is ready.

It's hard at first, there's a lot of blood, it pools, and he gets sick from it, but he keeps going, leaving the beta unconscious on the ground, maybe dead. All he cares for is his own freedom. All he

cares for is the fragile life inside that had no choice. It's escape burning in his lungs.

It's fresh air, gravel under his feet, the trees whipping by him.

He feels euphoric when he gets out, keeps running like his life depends on it.

Laughs in joy, as he feels like he's far enough away to be grateful.

"Where do you think you're going!?"

And then something hard hits him in the back of his head.

He lays there, dizzy, concussed, looking up not to alpha Choi's features, but Hwan's. Dark, possessive, and terrifying.

"*mine.*" He snarls, before dragging him back, kicking and screaming.

-

When he comes to, it's to alpha Choi staring down at him, eyes blazing. Hwan is nowhere to be seen.

"You're pregnant." He states. "With my dongsaeng." The last part, disgust.

Minho says nothing, sometimes this is the best option, sometimes it's not. Usually it is, today alpha Choi looks furious, and... and grief-stricken.

A pang hits Minho squarely in the chest.

Did he...?

He lets his guard down, the blow comes quick and sudden, and it never stops for a long time.

He tries to protect it. Him.

He tries.

-

He's dizzy, almost unresponsive, but Hwan is suddenly there, looking at him with red bloodshot eyes.

"You don't want this to happen again, do you?" He pleads.

Minho just nods.

Feels the emptiness, before he consciously knows it's there, hand curling. *His baby*. His pup.

He's gone.

Instinct, his inner omega is feral. But he can't move, too hurt. Too numb.

He feels nothing, can do nothing.

"Good." Hwan says, hands in his hair, kissing his temple as if he's a kind person. "Good."

It smells like a hospital, that's all he knows before he knows nothing again.

-

When he wakes up again, he's at the auction house.

"Third time is the charm." A voice mocks.

-

Seungmin's arms tighten, firm, but gentle, breathing erratic.

He's not the only one, Minho can feel it in his own lungs, and can feel it from Jisung behind him. Their scents cloy together in bitterness, grief, and a vain attempt at soothing. But it's hard to, when they're all choking on tears.

"I..." Seungmin can't say anything more.

Jisung hiccups, a sob building, lips at Minho's hair, neck, cheek, everywhere, hands squeezing into his, hugging so closely, so dearly.

“It’s okay.” He finds the courage to say, even as that emptiness comes back to him, compounded, like it never left. Just grew quiet for a while, hands and arms wrapped around himself. “You don’t have to say anything.”

They don’t, they hold him, scent him. He feels warm, and safe for the first time in a long time. And it’s more than he ever dared hope for.

Somewhere in all of it, Jisung hums softly. It helps.

-

Later, when the two younger omegas fall asleep, Minho untangles himself from them. Slowly, and carefully, his stomach aching with hunger, and his inner omega restless. He looks at the brownies longingly, but knows he won’t be able to eat them, or anything too rich. He threw up the food before, and he has no doubt that Dr. Seo’s instruction include a lighter diet until he’s more accustomed.

He’s experienced this type of re-feeding more times than he can count. Some owners are better than others, *were*, he reminds himself, as he slips quietly down dark and empty halls into the kitchen.

His heart startles a little when he sees a small light on, and a figure leaning over the sink.

He bumps into a chair before he can retreat.

The face turns, and eyes widen in surprise. A variety of emotions flickers, passing quickly on the pack alpha’s features. Surprise, relief, worry, and deep-set concern.

“Minho-ah? How are you feeling?” Gentle, careful, Chan doesn’t move from where he’s standing.

Minho looks down, sees his soapy hands, and all the dishes he dirtied from earlier when he was cooking. His heart pounds a little, a rush of strange emotion filling him, skin growing hot. He was going to clean them, but then... things happened.

“I can...?” He tries, stepping forward.

Chan’s smile makes him a little breathless, it’s tinged in tired worry, but filled with a softer affection that Minho’s never seen an alpha give. So tender, it aches. “I’ve got it, Minho-ah, let hyung, okay?”

He forgets that he’s older than him, it feels strange, and good, and too warm to be taken care of like this. *Does he mean it?*

Slowly, Minho nods.

“Are you hungry? I can warm some food up?” Chan says, gently.

Minho opens his mouth to protest, but Chan’s next words are firm, and a little pleading, “please, will you let hyung help you?”

As if it were Minho doing him the favour.

He nods, anyway, knows better than to argue.

He sits down at the table, sees the way Chan quickly wipes his hands, and reaches in the fridge. “What would you like?”

“Plain porridge.” He replies.

Chan stills a little, brows frowning, but then smiles, small. “Okay.” He agrees easily.

It doesn’t take long before it’s set in front of him with a glass of water.

“Can I sit with you? Or, I can go... whatever you want.” Chan says, a little awkwardly, sheepish, uncertain.

Minho bites his tongue at snapping that this is his kitchen, his house, his pack- he can do whatever he wants.

Instead, he smiles, says, “sure, hyung.” Surprising even himself when he says that.

But Chan’s smile is large, pleased, cheeks a little red, shy. Eyes

brimming with affection. “*Cute.*” He whispers, barely there, making Minho’s heart jump. “Let hyung peel you an egg, okay? You need your strength.”

He doesn’t argue, just starts to eat, heart hammering, skin flushed.

Chan looks so very happy sitting here, peeling him an egg for him, their eyes meet as he puts it on the table over for him, not touching, and he smiles again, as if there’s nowhere he’d rather be. As if this is normal, *natural*, but it isn’t. It shouldn’t be.

And yet, Minho wants so badly, it aches.

Slowly, carefully, he finds the courage of Seungmin’s stubbornness, and Jisung’s bravery to be soft in this cruel world, and says, “... Seungmin says you’re a good alpha... A good pack alpha.” He swallows another mouthful, it feels like cement.

His heart is so loud, and Chan’s gaze is so intense at these words, surprised, the alpha says a little shyly, “I try, Min-ah. I try, but I’m not perfect.” It’s terribly endearing, and too honest.

Minho still feels scared, but he feels brave too.

For the first time in years.

He just hopes it’s not the wrong decision again. He’s not sure he could take being broken again. After so many times before.

Swallowing, thickly, he takes the egg Chan left in front of him, takes a small bite, looks into the alpha’s kind eyes, heart in his throat, and says, “I’d like to try... *hyung*...” A leap of faith, foreign, fragile.

He’s not even sure what he’s saying, what he’s agreeing to, but Chan looks so happy, it startles him to his core.

“Thank you, Minho-ah... we won’t betray your trust. *I won’t.*” Chan reaches out, doesn’t touch him, just puts his hand on the table, palm up. An offer, but no real weight in it, not any Minho can see in his eyes. Just resting there, offering, as he says, “there’s a place for you here. In our pack. For as long as you want.”

He swallows thickly, looking up. “How so?”

Chan’s eyes look like they’re breaking a little. “As our equal, as a member of this pack. Platonic, more, in anyway your comfortable with... we’ve all talked about it. We want you.”

His heart skips.

“You don’t even know me.”

“We know enough.”

He eats the last of the egg, and then, so very carefully tentatively, finds himself reaching out, hesitant fingertips lightly brushing, a barely there touch, as Chan’s fingers curl around his a little. As Minh accepts it. Tries to believe he means it. Tries to let himself want again.

Not as owners, not as something owned, but as something equal.

“Please don’t break me, hyung, I don’t think I could take it again.” Voice, raw, too honest. His skin is hot, eyes down at their joined touch.

Chan’s eyes well up, touch still careful, but more protectively held, voice firm, “*I won’t*, baby. We won’t.”

His eyes spill over with tears, too.

Something tender, and fragile inside, shifts. Not put back together, not yet, but in the right spot. Close enough, to feel it with each breath, with every gesture, moving closer to its rightful place.

Chapter 9

Chapter Text

“Will you stay with me?” He says it slowly, a little hesitant, as if he’s testing the words. It’s a slow process, but he’s getting better at asking for the things he needs. Not many things, just a few small, essential things. Like more food to cook with for the omegas, and his pup, and he supposes the pack. Like, clarification on certain order. He asks for things that he needs like right now, in the clinic, about to get the birth control implant removed for good. Where they’re going to put light sedation in him, and he’s already shaking. Minho hates it the most when he can’t move right, when he’s trapped in a way where his own body betrays him.

Alphas seem to love this state of him, for himself it just leaves a sick feeling in his gut, and an inevitable path of pain. Of hurting.

Seungmin is different though, he gets angry at things like this. He’s also an omega, and so very strong, and smart, and brave. The kind of omega Minho always thought he himself would be, was, until it all got derailed. Fucked up.

He still blames himself, he doesn’t know how not to.

“Of course, hyung.” Seungmin says, earnest, face doing something pained, shifting before going back to an attempt at a smile.

Dr. Seo is going to remove it, and her nurses are all omegas too. It’s an out-patient thing. They don’t even need to go to the hospital. But it’s still terrifying for the other reasons. The loss of movement, of ability.

Minho grips the gown tightly, the exam bed he’s on, fingers tight, knuckles white.

“Hi, I’m Jiwoo, remember? I’m going to give you the sedation now, it will take about fifteen minutes to kick in, and then we’ll get started when you’re ready.” She says kindly, the sound of gloves being put on.

Minho looks away, towards Seungmin, feels his hand carefully touching his. He flinches a little, it's unexpected. "Sorry, hyung." Seungmin's voice grows deeper, apologetic, genuinely like he's beating himself up for forgetting this small thing. He hates it, grips that hand tightly in his, presses his face a little into the other omega's chest, shaking his head.

"It's okay, Minnie." The nickname slips out. "I- It's okay."

"Can I touch your hair, hyung?" Hesitant, soft, but still with an undercut of Seungmin's tough edge. "You can say no."

He shakes his head against that, trembling slightly, feels the band tight around his arm, can hear the needle. He's afraid of passing out again, sure, but it's the loss of control, of inhibition, even if they said it's mild, that's the worst. Makes him shake even deeper into himself. It's enough to throw him into this panic, it's enough for his heart to race, it's enough for him to want to carve it out of him, himself.

"I don't mind." He says, truly meaning it, any distraction would be everything right now.

Feels a hand in his hair, pushing his face into Seungmin's chest. "If it's too scary, don't look." Whispered, a gentle cascade, then, a little more hesitant at his own unspoken question not even formed into anything yet, just a quiet wondering, "this is what Chan-hyung did for me."

His heart thumps, and Minho can see it now. Can feel it. Chan's large hands, in his hair, his scent of deep woodsy, calm and relaxing enveloping him with Seungmin's cloves and spice. Can feel the deep rumble of the alpha's voice, can almost believe his words, and his promises. He relaxes, his body untenses, he can smell a note of Chan's scent underneath all of Seungmin's, into the pack scent, he breathes it in, lives there for a moment.

Feels the prick of the needle, and the sting. The flood of drugs.

Only then, does he really wonder about what Seungmin said. How Chan did this for him, too. Why would he need that? *What*

happened? His chest tightens painfully, his instincts rising a little, inner omega quietly distressed, trying to comfort. He turns, pressing his face into Seungmin, scenting him a little slightly, forgetting to ask. The sedation, or whatever it is exactly is doing its job.

“Sorry.” He hears himself say.

“What? Why?” Seungmin asks, voice still forcibly calm, quieter, probably for his benefit.

“I scented you without asking.”

He feels the amusement, the movement of Seungmin’s chest and belly, his arms, hand squeezing in his. “It’s okay, hyung. Thank you for asking, you can. Is it helping?”

He hums.

A moment, the band snaps, taken off, his arm is left alone. There’s the sound of mumbled words from Jiwoo, and then the door. He doesn’t move. Everything becomes a little floaty, it’s hard to describe it in his brain, he can only hold onto Seungmin. An anchor in a storm he doesn’t want to touch, let alone admit to the reality that it is there.

“You said hyung did this for you, what did you mean?” He realizes as he asks this that he probably shouldn’t be asking this. It’s... wrong, somehow. He can’t make out why. Doesn’t even understand that he called Chan a simple, ‘hyung,’ until after, where it feels strange. He can feel Seungmin tense, and a flash of fear fills him, but it’s far removed, his heart sluggishly tries to pound harder, but it can’t. “Sorry.”

“No. No, it’s fine.” Seungmin’s voice has grown harder, like dried clay turning to something solid and possibly rough, in a matter of seconds. “It was a while ago.”

Minho accepts his vague answer, he realizes too late, under the influence of the medication that he probably shouldn’t have asked at all.

“I don’t know much about Hyunjin.” He says, instead. He can’t

stand the silence, and his brain is pushing him, telling him he's entered some danger zone he never knew was there. So, he asks the first thing he can think, something he's been meaning to get around to saying, but he doesn't know how to normally. He's seen the other alpha, at the edge of his vision almost. He knows he eats his food, and he sometimes can hear his voice in other rooms, laughing, or talking, or teasing- he seems to like to do that a lot, but never a direct conversation to himself, just overheard snippets. Never a meeting up close.

Seungmin relaxes a little, clearly somewhat relieved of this topic change. "What do you want to know?"

He has a million questions, a million curiosities that almost slip out. That he's always wanted to ask. To know, but he knows he shouldn't. It's not his place, and it's not his business. He doesn't see Hyunjin often, but he knows he's there, knows he likes to tease a little, knows he doesn't like carrots, or onions, so he's been making dishes without. He also knows he's funny, and sometimes flirtatious in a way that makes the others blush and say some indignation, especially Felix. In a fun way, even if it has his own hackles raised a bit for a moment. The omegas never seemed scared, his omegas never seem scared. They like him.

Minho wonders if he'll like him too.

But most importantly, there's a different question, more important. It burns hot on his tongue. He shouldn't- but he can't help it. It slips out, becomes real in only a few syllables.

"Does he really want me too?"

Seungmin is terribly silent, and when Minho shifts, looking up, a little shaky, Seungmin is looking at him with an unreadable, pained expression on his features. He opens his mouth to say something, but a knock on the exam door stops him, stops them both.

"May we come in?" Dr. Seo says, politely.

"Yes." Minho says first, Seungmin still hasn't said anything, and the moments passed anyway. He really, just wants to get this over with.

Wants to be home, *nest*.

Seungmin's hand stays in his, it keeps him grounded, and present throughout it all.

-

He smells apples, freshly grown, the deep earth. It smells like an apple grove, rather than just an apple. The juice flowing over, it can be sweet, or slightly bitter. It's how Hyunjin smells, he's realized this a few times. Can distinction everyone else's in the pack scent, and then the remaining one is Hyunjin's, after that it was easy. To smell him, everywhere, even it is lightly pressed, barely there.

It's a nice scent, nicer than he ever thought an alpha's could be. It surprises him, like Chan's scent, he grows to crave it, too.

His awareness comes back in stages, slow and languid. The feel of movement, and then the light, flickering in and out as they move. A window he's staring into as trees go by. He thinks it's fall trees, the scent of the apple orchard thick and heavy along his skin. He realizes it's warmth, something fuzzy, wrapped around him tightly. It's not Hyunjin, just a deep impression. And it's not fall trees either. These are bare, snow sticking to them in pretty ice crystals on a particularly cold day, somewhere further away from the city, but close by. There's still warmth, lingering. His wrist aches faintly.

"Hey, hyung? We're driving back home now, remember? I'm sorry about the blanket, it's the only one we had in the car, and you were shaking. The doctor said that's normal, are you still cold?"
Seungmin's voice is kind, careful.

Minho feels a sharp twist in his gut, he hates when Seungmin thinks he has to be careful. Sometimes he prefers Felix's company, he never stops throwing his words, even if they might hurt. He doesn't censor himself. Sometimes he needs that, sometimes he doesn't. Mostly, he just doesn't want Seungmin to take on so much, to feel like he has to. Jisung was right about that part, too much.

"I- It's fine." He manages. "S nice."

He doesn't mean to say it out allowed, but he can feel the reaction his words have.

"Yeah?" A different voice asks, further away. *Changbin*, he thinks faintly.

"Mm. Like apples, and dirt." He says without thought.

There's a bit of chuckling, he doesn't know what's so funny, eyebrows furled.

"It's okay, hyung, they're just... being stupid." Seungmin deadpans at the end.

Minho feels amusement bubble, not anger, just happy. Lighter. But he can feel it fading, the medication, and then the slow ache inside, below. Remembers vaguely the doctor said the soreness will last a few days, and to take it easy.

He remembers their are other conversation too, extensive, and long.

Did he want another implant?

His first reaction was no, and that feeling hasn't faded, never did, but he also thought about everything else. About the inevitability of pregnancy if he is with an alpha, if this pack decided that they were done being nice. But that thought left him sick, anxious, and disgusted. He can't imagine it, that a scenario like that could happen, even his panicked part of him full of adrenaline, survival, and all the memories of being tricked before, used, come flooding in. He can't see it.

And of course, the birth control implant would help mediate his heats.

But, since he's never been on heat suppressants before, Dr. Seo said it wouldn't be a problem to take a low dosage, as long as he gets his nutritional status back up to healthy levels.

She also wants him to have physical therapy, and other therapies, but they've tabled that discussion for now. The thought alone, some

stranger... he can't.

Or, maybe he can.

"Hey, hyung, it's okay. It's okay. Do you want to scent me again? Will that help?" Seungmin's voice cuts in, soothing.

Minho can smell his cloves becoming stronger, grounding, calming.

He nods, feels and smells his own soured scent now in his distress.

He curls deeper into the blanket, presses into cloves, feels and smells so good, he sighs, a little drunk off of it.

"Shit." Another voice says, Changbin, he reminds himself. Just Changbin. But still, his heart pounds, worried by such a reaction, only for it to be followed by Changbin's voice growing soft and sweet with, "he's so cute."

-

Seungmin offers him his company if he needs it, or anyone else's, but the truth is that he wants to be alone. He needs to be alone. He says it faintly, with vague words, uncertain as the drugs wear off if this is an acceptable answer. It's all muddled in his mind, and all he can feel is soreness, and a careful ache in his chest where the pup he lost rests eternally now. Seungmin seems to understand all the same, nodding firmly. "Of course, please keep the blanket. You're still shaking, hyung."

Voice worried, filled with concern, but he lets him go, and Minho finds himself slipping back into his room, locking the door quickly. He moves to the bathroom, through there and another lock, into his nest in the small cupboard. It's a tight squeeze as usual, but it's comfortable, small, a little cool but the blanket helps. It fits perfectly in fact with Innies jacket at his head. The pack scent of his own clothing and blankets underneath, put into its perfect spots.

He moves around a little, gets comfortable, makes a home there for the next three days.

He gets up and eats of course, moves around, but Dr. Seo said to

rest, so he does.

His mind drifts to the fragile life he carried more than he likes to admit, and how empty he feels. If he wanted, he could- but he won't. He doesn't.

Minho feels his throat thicken in emotion, and after three days, only one way to get it out.

The food he made before the procedure is probably already gone, his omegas and pup like to eat a lot, not to mention the rest of the pack. So, early on the fourth day, he sneaks out of his room, down the quiet hall of the house in the earliest light of morning, and slips into the kitchen.

His nose inhales sharply, something smells good. Baked cinnamon, and nutmeg.

His eyes slip to the muffins cooling off on a rack next to the stove.

His lips curl faintly, the scent of pumpkin not far behind, the slightest bit of cream. *Felix*, he must have been baking. Sometimes he hears him in the night. Jisung says it's hard for him to always be at ease. Baking helps. And he's good at it, Minho steps closer, mouth watering, tempted to take one.

He refrains, reminds himself it's not for him, that he doesn't have permission. They could be for the alphas, he's not sure. He turns to his own task instead. Cooking breakfast and making some snacks to store in the fridge for later, whenever someone is hungry. He opens the fridge now, wondering what he has to work with, and feels his heart thud a little, always slightly surprised when he sees how full it has become again.

He's sure it's just the alpha making sure he does his job- but, Chanhyung isn't really like that. He swallows thickly, remembers faintly how Chan was driving them, the pack leader, how he stayed so silent in the driver's side, and throughout the procedure. He seemed tense losing back, eyes heavy on himself, focused and intent. But he stayed silent, it was Seungmin who guided him, and Changbin who broke the tense atmosphere before, and after.

Truthfully, he wasn't paying much attention himself, so nervous and afraid, and then out of it from the medications.

Dr. Seo showed him the implant right after.

It was kind of gross, but it helped, a lot of his fears. Somehow she knew, he needed proof.

Minho looks down at his ingredients and finds with something big pressing in his chest. He wants to make something for everyone. Needs to.

Not everyone likes the same things, so he'll have to make a few dishes for breakfast. He doesn't mind. He just wants everyone to be happy, fully, satisfied. It's a Sunday, no one works today, he's certain, but they'll need extra food for the week, to keep up their strength. He knows Seungmin is at that firm, and Jisung works at the hospital on the night shift this week. Chan is a music producer of some kind, Monday to Fridays typically. Felix is now more of an influencer online, but he has appointments usually all week. He's not sure about Changbin, or Hyunjin, but Innies has classes, his first year at university. He's trying to go back, despite everything that happened.

He thinks about these things as he prepares, and cooks the food.

Let's his mind wander, drift.

It's a welcome distraction.

-

"It smells amazing in here! Hyung? Is that you? Why are you up so early?" Felix's voice is full of fresh air, and life. He walks in with excitement, and Minho is happy to see when he turns from the almost finished food, how Felix looks like he did get some rest. He wasn't up the whole night, which is good, it makes something settle in his own chest where his inner omega's instincts were trying to claw out again. So real, and visceral ever since he got here, harder to control.

"I wanted to cook." He says, simply, skin flushing a little. "Your

muffins smell more amazing.”

He smiles, and Felix’s blinks, looking towards the already cooled off muffins now packed away in containers.

“I hope you don’t mind.” Minho adds, a little nervous.

Felix just breaks out into a grin, a little sheepish. “I forgot about those, I was kind of out of it last night. Oh, what did you think of them? New recipe.”

His heart thumps, worriedly about Felix’s words of being, ‘out of it,’ but then his chest pounds for a different reason. “Oh, I wasn’t sure...” He trails off.

Felix frowns. “Hyung, when I bake it’s for the pack, for everything, including you, okay? To be honest, I’m a little insulted that they weren’t good enough for you to devour them at first glance, but I think I’ll live.”

He method acts tears in front of him, but Minho’s inner omega can’t tell the difference, he’s already reaching for one, taking a bite. And really, it is amazing. He loves the taste, reminds him of Seungmin, which is an odd thing to think, but he can’t help but miss him even after a few days. So strange to have someone so close, and then, *not*. Even Innie... maybe that’s why he cooked such a big meal, he just needs everyone close. Wants to see them, he means.

“They’re really delicious, Lix-ah. So soft.”

“Right? I used yogurt, game changer.” Felix says. “So, breakfast? Who should I call to join us?”

It’s said light-hearted, but Minho can see the way it’s deliberately worded for his own sake. Usually, he doesn’t like everyone here. Can’t handle the way the alphas sit, even if far away, the way their pheromones are so strong, and dominating in that familiar undercut of authority. It’s not as strong as the alphas before, in fact it’s lighter, careful, but for himself, it’s hard to differentiate between then, and now. Sometimes, it just feels all jumbled up.

Dr. Seo says, he needs to talk to someone, a professional in the mind, too.

He's trying.

He wonders sometimes why it's not enough, but moments like these, he understands why she's so insistent. Why Jisung has subtly let him know it's okay to seek different treatments. But Seungmin, he's more adamant, that it's whatever he himself wants. Even if it's not the popular choice.

It's comforting.

Sometimes, it feels like only Seungmin keeps him breathing through the next moment, just as much as Innies, his pup.

"Innie." He breathes, a little desperate. "Seungmin, Jisung... Changbin should come too. Chan, and Hyunjin."

Felix's face flickers only a little. "Okay. But just know, the alphas don't always get up this early, so it's okay if you don't include them just yet."

It's the truth, he can tell, but it's also a way out.

Minho shakes his head. "You can text them, just uh... let me get everything ready first."

Felix smiles, nodding. "Of course, want help?"

He doesn't deny him, they move the dishes on the table together. The food, and plates and utensils, until Minho finds his spot at one end of the table, the furthest away from the door, back to the corner of the room, able to face and see everything. He nods to Felix's silent question, as he texts everyone, and his own heart thumps wildly. The younger omega takes a seat next to him, casually, but clearly filled with intention.

Hyunjin comes first, apples drifting in. He smiles, careful, a little awkwardness between them as Minho manages a small smile back.

"Hi, hyung." The alpha says.

He hums, unable to form words, fingers curling together under the table, hand gripping his wrist as the dull ache become more prominent under his grip, and the loss of distraction momentarily.

Hyunjin sits almost the furthest from him. A chair short of it, almost deliberately.

Minho understands later, after Jisung has run in happily with Seungmin grumpily behind him, both sitting near him. After Changbin takes the seat next to Felix, and then Innies comes in, pouting before everyone moves down so he can sit next to himself, hands seemingly restless, wanting to reach out.

Minho's heart skips. "Come here, pup." He says softly, weary of the other alpha in the room, but Hyunjin is speaking to Felix about something, lost in their own world as Innies leans into him, hugging him, sort of, mostly, his face nuzzles against his chest, his shoulder and to his throat, scenting carefully, gently.

Minho presses back against him, settling more relaxed as his scent of minty citrus, tinges of deep rum run over him. He keeps it pointedly light, not too deep, aware of the others, and eyes, and his own nerves. Jeongin looks a little disappointed when he pulls back, fingers curled, skin flushed and breath shallow. But he acquiesces, when Minho finds the words to say firmly, "be good, pup."

He looks to the food as he feels a few pairs of eyes burning into him. But it's all disrupted, that slight tense moment, when Chan finally walks in. Pack alpha. He's on alert, body straight, eyes cast down a little as everyone else looks to him too.

For a moment, he finds himself afraid, he can't help it.

It disappears in a matter of seconds when Chan says, "sorry, I was working."

And someone says exasperated, definitely Felix, "hyung, you have to stop taking your work home, you're going to exhaust yourself."

"Yeah, hyung, we talked about this." Jisung says, even worse.

"Chan-hyung doesn't know when to quit." Hyunjin chimes in.

“Guess we have to make you.” Before pushing a piece to his mouth, forcing him to eat, and chew.

The blatant disrespect has Minh’s body tensing, but when he catches Chan’s blushing cheeks, and his sheepish look to his pack, he finds himself relaxing. All their scents are calm, he reminds himself. No one is making sudden movements, everything is okay.

“Please, don’t work yourself too hard, hyung.” He says quietly, not meaning for the words to slip out, it’s just with the relief of everything being okay, the pack leader’s words register. His own instincts overtake him, his inner omega urging him with more authority than he should be capable of, and ever has, to firmly almost chastise the alpha. Which is crazy.

And his eyes widen, looking up to the pack alpha as he realizes what he said.

Everyone has paused a little, and Chan is looking at him surprised too, blinking a little, before a slow smile rolls onto his lips. “Ah, okay, Min-ah.”

He wants to say more, but he knows that was too much already, instead Minh clears his throat. “Everyone’s hungry, please eat.”

He hears their words of gratitude for the food, hears everyone dishing up after Chan, and then himself. It’s not exactly hierarchy. It’s more, like respect. Somehow, he distinguishes it. Somehow, he’s learning.

But, looking at how everyone waits for Chan to eat first, and then himself, he does feel a little uncomfortable. Worried. That maybe he was wrong. Just a small nudge in the back of his mind, a piece of thread tied to bigger things still there, that he can’t help but feel tug.

He eats, they all do, and small conversations break out across the table. It becomes warm, almost normal, and Minh feels himself getting lost in it.

It's okay for a while, but after some time, nearly an hour, he feels exhaustion creep in. Feels his nerves on fire, and an anxiety he can't describe filling him. There's just so many of them. It's just so loud, so much noise, so many scents. It was nice, and now it's almost too much.

He feels a hand in his, startling a little, he looks up, Felix is staring back at him. Something unspoken passes between their eyes then, something unspoken, shared pain, an understanding, no one else would really get it.

Felix grins, then turns to the others. "Hey, alphas... I was really curious about that thing we talked about... want to?"

Chan's face is red, and Hyunjin is smiling wickedly.

Innie looks between them a little confused, and innocent.

"Sorry, Innie, not you this time." Felix grins. "I think Minho-hyung wants you to today anyway. Hey, Sungie, you wanted to join too, right?"

Jisung is looking completely like a tomato, but his eyes are clearly intrigued.

Minho just feels a little light-headed, and terribly relieved when they all disappear down the hall.

When it's just the three of them now, it feels a little easier to breathe.

"I'll clean up." Jeongin volunteers, getting up quickly. "And then I'll join you. Do you want to watch a movie, hyung? Let's have a movie day, okay?" He's smiling, clearly hopeful, maybe just a little desperate. Maybe he missed him too.

Minho can't say no, his heart melts, too soft, he nods quietly. "Okay." He breathes. "But I can help clean..."

"You can leave it, hyung, it's Innie's turn anyway." Changbin says, gentle but firm.

Seungmin's already standing, rolling his eyes. "I hate movie days."

Jeongin sticks his tongue out at him, and Minho suppresses a laugh at Seungmin's responding glare.

"That's just because you only like thriller movies, weirdo." Jeongin mumbles.

Seungmin sighs, long and suffering. "Sorry if romance bores the fuck out of me."

"Language." He finds himself saying sternly, without even realizing it. "Don't talk to someone who's younger than you like that."

Everyone freezes a little, especially, Changbin, Minho can feel his eyes on the back of his neck.

Seungmin looks to Minho, gaze looking away, young and sheepish. "Sorry."

Everyone untenses, continues what they were doing.

"Why doesn't Innie pick one movie, and you pick one movie, then?" Minho offers. "I don't mind thrillers."

Seungmin perks up a little. "Really?"

"They're the only kind of movies I used to sneak into the theater to see." He confirms.

Seungmin seems very happy by this, as grins a little wicked, and says, "let's go, hyung, I'll show you my collection."

He's practically dragged out of the kitchen, into a living room filled with couches and a large TV, but mostly bookcases of movies. Hard copy, physical media, lining the walls is dozens and dozens of horror, and thriller movies.

Minho's mouth opens a little, astonished. "Wow."

"I've been collecting them since I got here." Seungmin recalls. "Which one should we watch?"

Minho feels his heart flip a little when Seungmin looks at him like this, half-excited, gleeful, full of life and youth. And just a little bit soft, maybe even, *loving*? His heart warms so incredibly, distracts him from the building ache in his chest that grows.

He remembers distantly that Jisung said it was going to snow again tonight.

“Something Innie will be able to watch.” He says.

Seungmin’s smile drops a little, into a sort of an adorable pout, before he grins again. “Sure, I’ve got just the thing.”

Changbin comes up behind them then, asking carefully, “can I join?”

Minho gulps, turns to the beta, smiling gently. “Sure. Do you mind this type of movie?”

Changbin shrugs. “I’m fine with whatever. But, I actually wanted to ask you something, hyung.”

Minho’s heart picks up a little, but he smiles through it, and the nervousness. Seungmin’s here, it helps. “Sure.”

“I’m not sure if anyone mentioned it, but I’m a trained physical therapist, I also do training work with people who have gone through certain injuries... I was just wondering if maybe I could massage your wrist, help relieve some of the pain, I could tell it’s been bothering you.” Changbin explains, carefully, voice gentle.

It makes his heart skip, and his hands clutch together instinctively towards his chest.

“You can say no, hyung.” Seungmin gently reminds him.

Changbin nods quickly. “Of course. No pressure, I just wanted to offer, I’d like to help you. I really would, if you want.”

“I’ll be right here with you.” Seungmin assures as he swiftly puts the movie in, grabbing the remote, guiding him silently towards the couch, not touching, just careful steps beside him. Minho goes,

slow, willing, but slowly. A little apprehensive.

He didn't want a stranger... But, Changbin isn't a stranger.

He's pack.

He startles a little at the thought.

They sit on the couch, Seungmin close to him on his right, feels their bodies press together, flush and hot. The heat brimming, a little tension. It feels very intimate as his back leans into Seungmin's front and shoulder, as Changbin sits close to him, facing him, legs curled up. His hand is held out, a silver ring on his further finger, waiting, an offer more than anything.

Minho gulps, but reaches out, feels Suengmin's breath painting hotly in his ear. Feels Seungmin's arm wrap around him, "this okay, hyung?"

He nods, the heat becomes a little burning, his skin flushes, but no one says anything.

He realizes Seungmin is holding him, that his hand is so softly being placed in Changbin's. Feels the heat of him, the barely there way he touches him. Feels his hands begin to move along his hand, his wrist, carefully pressing into his skin, his muscles, tendons, down to the bone. His teeth clench tightly, as Seugmin's arm tightens, and his face presses into the back of his neck, clove surrounds him, explodes in comfort, and soothing pheromones.

Changbin's hand, and ocean waves wash over him peacefully. "Tell me if anything I do hurts, okay, hyung?"

He nods, feels Seungmin's lips pressed in as he rests there against him, as the movie begins to play. *Where's his pup?*

Changbin's hands are amazing.

The dull ache fades, and it feels so good, he has to bite back a moan. It makes him flush hotter at the realization. Small goosebumps, beginning to spread along his skin the longer Changbin does this, the closer they both get. Heart pounding

deeper, too.

Changbin's gaze finds his, pupils a little dark as he watches him.
"Better, hyung?"

He nods, his voice failing him.

Even more so, when Changbin so very carefully, cradles his wrist, his hand, and leans in, pressing his lips along his knuckles, his fingertips, down to the inside of his hand. Along his palm, his wrist, soft little presses of kisses. So tenderly sweet, it aches something in his chest.

He pulls back, keeps massaging his wrist.

Minho gulps thickly, looks to the TV, feels it then. For the first time in what must be forever.

Feels... *nothing*. No ache, no pain there.

It's almost too much, a lump forms, tears well up.

It's like a phantom limb, but reverse.

"Hey." Jeongin's voice breaks through then, somewhere from the doorway. "I wanted to cuddle, hyung!"

He smiles, helplessly, and warm.

Chapter 10

Notes:

feel free to scream at me in the comments if you want, haha 🤪
or just let me know your thoughts about what's going to happen next/what you think should.
!! <3

Chapter Text

“How are you feeling Mr. Lee?” Her voice is calm, warm, even inviting. Her office matches that warmth, soft tones of green, beige, it’s comforting, calm. It’s an environment with worn couches, and echoed imprints of the catharsis of grief, and emotion. The kind of that comes from the deepest depths of anyone’s souls. There’s a certain feeling of security in the way it all feels trapped here. The way it feels as if it will never get out. Not unless he wants it to. “Mr. Lee?”

Seungmin was right.

Minho startles, looks up, readjusts himself in the chair, opens and closes his mouth once or twice, but it’s difficult to get it out. Difficult to get anything out. How can he know how he’s feeling? How can he when none of this feels free? When he stopped being a person a long time ago?

She’s waiting, expectant, he feels the pinpricks of anxiety and fear run its course up his skin, through his veins.

He wants to run again.

It’s strange how this new, old, normal feeling feels so odd. It doesn’t go here, not with him, not anymore. He doesn’t know it anymore, the ability to run, to express, to exist. But, it’s come back. Somehow it’s more gut wrenching, more impactful than any tears, any remembrance of grief. Allowed to feel it at all.

It feels like a terrifying victory.

A push-and-pull.

If he gets to a point they call, 'better,' then he gets to a point of humanity. A place he can't survive in, and what if he still needs to just survive? What then?

His mind races, heart pounding, eventually, Minho licks his dry lips. "Can you call me Minho, please?"

Lee Know, doesn't exist anymore.

He's trapped under his mother's kitchen table, still listening to the sounds of his father's heavy footsteps always drawing near. Before they ever reached him. It's a good place to be, it's enough innocence to be comforting, enough fear and anxiety to be manageable. And all the possibility to be anything else, but this.

"Of course, Minho-ssi." She smiles.

Her name is Dr. Melfi. She's not Korean, but her pronunciation is perfect. Seungmin said she helped him learn English better, before he was too afraid to speak it with Chan, and then Felix. Felt out of place, uncomfortable, afraid of doing the wrong thing. He had to get over it, he explained, had to. Face it head on with a force that matches his determination, and stubbornness perfectly. Or, so, he himself inferred from their conversations.

It gave himself a certain type of hope, of want. A desire to be healthy. But, he still can't help but ask himself, at what cost?

"You don't have to say an emotion, if that's too difficult, and in fact you don't have to do anything you don't want to here, Minho-ssi. What I said earlier, I meant. But, I would really like you to try to put into words, however you feel like you can. As long as it makes sense to you, as a long as it's true for you, how you are feeling. Can you try?" Dr. Melfi's earnest eyes meet his, calm, and patient.

He swallows thickly, nods. Somehow, this feels like a really difficult thing. The hardest since he got to this new pack, this new place.

They've never asked him to do anything he doesn't want to do, so he's never leaned anywhere near anything difficult. And there are a lot of things that are difficult.

This, right here, it's difficult, but it was not asked of him. It was merely offered.

He was the one who insisted on it.

Needs it.

Afraid of what he'll do.

"I..." He says slowly, carefully, and then honest, breathing deeply, out, "I feel like I'm fading."

-

"How does that feel?" Seungmin's hands are gentle, a little shaky, awkward, but gentle and warm. He closes the new collar around his throat, readjusting it carefully, until he's satisfied. Moving back a little to make sure, fingertips tracing along the delicate skin there, moving along his throat. Minho shivers slightly, feels his breath on his skin, can taste the other omega's scent so strongly here. It burns in the best way. "Hyung?"

Concerned eyes meet his, and Seungmin pulls back a little. He has the urge to reach out in turn, curl his fingers into him, and bring him back, keep him here closer still. Wants to lean in even deeper, taste him, exist somewhere else.

He doesn't, he breathes through it, lets him go without even touching him. Thinks instead about Chan, and how his hands would probably be more steady, more sure, and firm, but no less careful. No less gentle, maybe even a little more tender with the enormity of it all. Seungmin is different, as an omega, but the closeness they naturally share that has grown, it's not a bad different, or lesser, it's just different.

His breath comes out shaky, he nods. "Feels good." He admits, hand reaching up to his throat, fingers tracing along the incredibly soft material. It's so light, he knows he could get lost in cooking, or

his own thoughts, and forget it's even there in the first place. It's a pretty color too. A green he always admired, stared a little too long at when Seungmin brought him the swatches. Said that if he didn't want to take it off, he'd get his own chosen one, something he loves. He appreciates it more than he can say, but he can't help but mourn the loss of Seungmin's collar around his throat just a little. It was more weighted, had more of a marker with it. More secure.

This is light, freeing, *his own*. The possessive tendrils curl, for more.

"Chan..." He trails off, unsure how to finish the sentence without it coming off in the wrong way. Without making Seungmin upset.

As it is, the omega's eyes narrow a little, before he sighs, eyes rolling. "Yeah, Chan approved it." He says like it's the worst thing in the world, but for Minhø, he feels lighter than ever, so very relieved, and the collar grows a little heavier. Not painfully, not even close, this is a different kind of weight. It's security.

He nods. "Good."

Seungmin sighs a little but doesn't argue. "Anyway, are you sure you'll be okay with everyone else leaving for two weeks?"

His heart skips a little at the mention of the pack trip to Chan's parent's house a few hours away. It was planned in advance, sort of an annual tradition. Usually, everyone goes, but he can't fathom it for himself. And Seungmin has the excuse of a big case he's on, and Jeongin has assignments for his classes due despite the break.

He's sure that this is just an excuse for them both to stay with him, and he feels guilty enough for it, but Dr. Melfi says, he's not in charge of another's agency. She said it in a way that hurt, her explanation that is, but it cut in the right way. It leaves a lasting impression, he won't forget it. Even if the guilt still ebbs, and flows.

He was afraid at first that they'd make him go, but Chan said in a way that he'd be staying to keep an eye on the younger two, making it seem like he was doing him a favour. It helps. And yet, *and yet*.

"I'll be fine." He assures, and then adds, a little happily if not a little heavy, "you'll be here."

Seungmin huffs some air, seeing right through him. "Trust me, hyung, I've visit Chan's parents more times than I can count. I spent a few summers with them, you know? We're on great terms, and we're planning on going back this summer again too in a few months. And this case, honestly, it's really going to help my career in the long-run, even I'm not sitting at the table. Really, you being here is doing me a favour."

"And Innie?" He can't help but ask.

Seungmin's eyes become a little dazed. "Aw, have you seen that puppy? He's been begging for more time with you, trust me, he'll be happy to have you all to himself."

"Chan?" A little more breathless, frightened.

A tension builds in a different direction now, as Seungmin's eyes become that familiar frustrated look, before he huffs again. "Chan will live. Okay, Chan is totally cool with it, happy? Who cares what he thinks? But honestly, he just wants you safe and happy. That's all he wants for any of us. Trust me, hyung, okay? Even if you can't trust him, yet, please try to trust our actions."

He's right.

It's been a few months, and there hasn't been any indication that this is a dream, a false sense of lulled security. Only for the rug to be torn out from under him so violently.

But, then again, he lived for fifteen years in that home before it was pulled out from under him in such violence.

Some alphas are really patient.

He nods, anyway, and tries to smile, although he knows it comes out a little strained with how Seungmin's face falters a little.

"Hyung..." Seungmin says, hand hovering. "Can I touch you?"

He nods, easily, even as he feels the younger omega's sudden nervousness, unsurely movements. His loss of confidence is terrifying, but his touch is entirely tender when his fingertips ghost along his skin, his cheeks, Minho's eyes shut as he feels him.

Lips on his cheek, and then pressing in, *scenting*.

Barely there touch, to desperate.

He hangs on back, as Seungmin's nose presses down his jaw, into his throat, at his scent glands. A whine building, let out only when he presses in back, feels his heat, his warmth. Hot all over. They're scenting each other, but it's not careful anymore, it grows somewhat ferally, animalistic. He's not sure what overcomes him. Just knows they're pushed into the bed, and Seungmin pressed flushed against every part of him.

And then he feels it, hard press of his cock.

His heart swoops, but as soon as he feels it, it's gone.

Seungmin is standing up, breathing heavily, legs a little wobbly, skin red and eyes wide, hazy. "Ah, s- sorry, hyung. Excuse me." He says, quickly, before disappearing out of his room with hurried, quick movements. Hands, noticeably, pressed down lower.

Minho shuts the door behind him, a little shocked, but then a smile begins to form on his lips, and a strange bubble of laughter on his lips.

His forehead presses into the wood of the door, and his lips curl, "sweet."

Affection blooming like a thousand flowers.

He feels how hot he is too though, the careful throb in his pants that feels so strange. So natural.

Feels like his own.

His fingers curl into his pants, not touching himself, but close, thinking of Seungmin's flushed features, and the press of his face

against his own, his skin, his hands, everywhere. His body. It felt good, against his own. Felt strangely right.

He misses it.

Wonders where he went.

Wonders if he got someone else to help him out.

Wonders if he's still thinking about him.

Minho takes a cold shower, and curls into his nest, mind on replay, going over every touch, every press of skin, every breath. His scent, imprinted on his skin. Deeper, yet, still.

-

“And I made these for you to take. I hope you don’t mind, I found the cooler bags in the pantry cupboard. I filled with them with some extra ice so everything will stay cold on the drive. There should be enough for everyone on the way there.” He explains, pushing the bags carefully into Chan’s hands as he stares at them, a look of awe, wonder, and something kinder. It sparks in his eyes as he smiles, and Minho’s nerves are forgotten about for a moment, and the distinct worry that he talked too much.

Instead, he just feels, settled, warm. It cascades over him.

He bites his tongue against the other words that want to spill out, words like, ‘don’t eat too much gas station food,’ and, ‘drink lots of water.’

“Thank you, Minho-ah, this means... this means a lot.” Chan says, arms curling around the containers in his full hands, eyes full of something else now, strong, almost yearning for something, to do something. “For all of us.”

He gulps at what that could mean, and is both grateful for the barrier of food, and annoyed with it. Which, is a new feeling. To want to get past the fear, uncertainty, to see if it’s really as terrible as his mind conjures when it comes to Chan, as pack leader, and all of the alphas here. Maybe not alphas in general, that’s still... he

wouldn't want that. But here, right now, he feels it too, deep in his chest, pull tight, that same yearning for something.

"Are you sure you'll be alright without us?" Chan asks, in earnest.

It's an old conversation, they've had it before.

Well, he overheard it anyway, Chan speaking with Changbin about cancelling it a week ago, uncertain about leaving him with most of them gone, but Minho insisted they should go. No matter the personal cost to himself it took when he stood up, and said those words, heart hammering, palms sweating, the world becoming twisty and bendy into a new territory he has never charted before.

He wants them to go.

Needs them to.

He'll be fine.

They shouldn't all upend their life just for him.

Besides, the doctor said pack is important yes, for him to get healthier quicker, but it's not as if he's going to be alone. His pup will be here, and so will Seungmin- sort of. He'll be at the firm a lot, working on this case, but Minho wants to make sure he's taken care of too. He's seen how lost he gets in things, much like Chan.

"Yes." He smiles, hopes it reaches his eyes. "I want you to go." This part at least is honest. "Please send my regards, and my well wishes to your parents."

Chan smiles. "You know, they'd really love you."

His heart pounds fiercely, ears growing hot. "Well... maybe..." He stops himself, it isn't his place. And the thought alone, makes him nauseous. But for a moment, a brief moment, he can almost believe in the fairytale of it all. That Chan's parents, his pack before he started his own, really isn't like any of the others before him.

"Maybe next time." Chan finishes for him, stepping closer, space becoming smaller, tension pressing in deep.

He can hear his heartbeat, it pounds in his head, makes it thicker with heat.

Chan's eyes are soft, and warm, and inviting. The rest of him is too.

"Everything's all set, hyung, we just need- oh. *Oh*. Sorry!" Changbin says, quickly, before disappearing from the kitchen altogether in a hurry.

Minho feels like cold water was poured down his neck, he steps back quickly, and Chan breathes, coughing slightly. "Ah, we should get going."

"I'll walk with you." He replies, as they move out towards the front door.

It's a quick goodbye, really. He doesn't get close to many of them, only Jisung clings to him, the rest give waves, and well wishes. Only Changbin touches his hand briefly, a silent question in his eyes, that he answers with, gently, "It's warmer, Bin-ah. I'll be fine." Thumb swiping once against the delicate skin there that aches fiercely some days, before it's gone.

Seungmin's goodbyes are with him rolling his eyes as everyone takes turns hugging him, mumbling, "it's only two weeks."

Jeongin enthusiastically bear hugs everyone, scenting aggressively, before letting go.

The two cars are lined up, packed with luggage, as everyone climbs in, and then drives off.

They stand there awhile watching, him and Jeongin. Seungmin on the other hand goes back in, mumbling about a case precedent he has to go over.

"Chan's parents are really great." Jeongin says from next to him, his hand touching his carefully, making Minho's heart leap, but then settle as his scent of citrus, deeper rum falls over him. Their hands brush, and then tentatively press together, holding gentle, but firm. "They used to live in Australia, but after Chan realized his life was here, they decided to move back. His extended family is here too,

and his sister found her mate close by as well. They've welcomed us with open arms. One day, hyung, they'll welcome you, too."

His heart squeezes, almost painfully, as he hums.

"You must miss them." He says, feeling the guilt steep in his tone.

Jeongin makes a noise of backtracking. "Please, I didn't mean it like that! I'll see them again soon, and really, I just want to spend more time with you. I chose this."

He nods, giving him a smile, but still feels uncertain.

"Can I scent you, hyung? Please, let me show you I mean it." Jeongin says sadly, eyes turning puppy, adorable, and too much for Minho to handle.

"Okay, okay, let's go inside first, pup, okay?"

Jeongin's smile grows, dazzling, practically skipping inside, himself dragged along.

-

Much of the next few days go on like this. Jeongin drags him to the couch to scent him, he claims it's to keep him well-balanced since the other's are gone, but they mostly cuddle a lot, entangled in warmth, and the steady sound of his pup's heartbeat, he finds it's easier to rest. Rest in the way Dr. Seo urges him to, her and Dr. Melfi. The TV becomes background noise, and his mind goes to that hazy place, *drifting*, in a way they insist he needs to get back to.

But he always snaps himself out of it before it can become too much, or anything really. He can't go any deeper than this, it's still entwined in his body, unsafe. Danger. He must stay alert.

Seungmin isn't around much, so Minho uses his cell they gave him and texts him almost every mealtime, asking if he ate. Making him his favourites. Making him packed lunches to go.

Seungmin takes them, offering a small, "thanks." Eyes averted as he does, lost on his phone, still with head buried in work.

It worries the other omega, but he lets it go, as long as he sees his omega sleeping, eating well, and taking breaks, he won't push it. Besides, it's only been a couple of days of this, and as far as he can tell Seungmin is eating, and has been coming home to sleep. He partially suspects this might have to do with himself being here, and the doctor's orders, but he doesn't care. As long as his neediness is doing some good, it can't be so bad, can it? Either way, he'll take the win.

Jeongin on the other hand is very... clingy.

He plasters himself to his back, wrapping around as he tries to cook, saying things like, "smell good, hyung." And, "let me scent you, please?"

He's at his side when he has free time, mostly movies, even though he doesn't necessarily like the same genre as him, he just buries his face in his side, and gets lost there, or scrolls on his phone, still pressed against him.

When he reads books, from the library he recently found, sitting in the window seat, Jeongin is there.

"You don't always have to stay by, hyung, pup. I'll be fine on my own for a while." He tells him, hand pressing into his hair.

Jeongin looks up, beginning to frown. "But I want..." Pouting, now. "I need to." Curled a little possessively, protectively even. "You shouldn't be alone right now. My... my alpha doesn't want you to be."

It's a little strange, but after everything they've been through together, not unheard of.

He keeps a note of it, decides to ask Dr. Melfi about it. If it's healthy, if he should be doing something differently than encouraging it. The last thing he wants is to make things worse for his pup, with nonaction, just as much as action.

For now, he simply nods, and lets it go.

He likes it anyway, selfishly, he can admit to himself in his few

moments alone.

He wants his pup close, and he wants Seungmin to come home. He wants all of them to come home, but mostly, he needs his omegas. Feels such a strong urge one morning, four days in, that it catches his breath out of him.

He texts Seungmin if he ate.

He gets an immediate answer that he did.

Then, he texts Jisung, who gives him a lot of happy emojis and along explanation of their trip so far.

And then, Felix, who gives emojis with sunglasses, and says how Chan has become a puppy with his parents, and how adorable it is.

They're all okay, and yet...

He swallows, thickly, eyes looking over to trace Jeongin's sleeping features. Somehow his pup stayed in his best last night, clinging to him, but more importantly, he woke up clinging to him back.

He's very handsome, attractive, cute.

And safe.

He could just...

He shakes his head, violently, heart pounding, wondering what he is thinking, before getting out of bed. Leaving the room, even though his inner omega is clawing to get back to his pup, to his nest, to-

He's hungry.

He's been craving his favourite foods, and he makes them now, going through the motions, trying to shake off the feelings, only they don't go away. They get worse, more intense. He can't even cook, can't focus on the next step, just stands there in the kitchen, a little paralyzed, a lot of afraid. It's overpowering, becoming painfully obvious with every deep, shaky breath to what they all

mean.

Suddenly, he's in the main bathroom, behind a locked door, curled up, aching cramps in his belly, instincts on haywire, mind going a hazy mess as he realizes what's happening. He's cold, alone, and so far from his nest. And Seungmin isn't even home. And now- now, he's started to slick.

Minho realizes too late, that he's in his heat.

Chapter 11

Notes:

chapter's a little shorter, but i've been struggling.



hope you like it regardless!! won't be leaving off on any cliffhangers any time soon for a while, i prom.

Chapter Text

It's bad until it's not.

It's bad until Seungmin.

"I'll help you, hyung, don't worry." Jeongin's voice is slightly panicked, and he is far too close, hands all over, and it's too much, but Minho knows he only has himself to blame. He came to his room, came to his alpha because it's better that way. Better to get it rip it off like a bandaid. His alpha knows he's in heat, he can do what he needs to do, and soon it will be over.

The other part of him, just wanted to be closer to his nest. Selfish, he knows this, but he can't help the urge, the instincts pulling tightly within him, urging him to do this. To let himself be at the mercy of another alpha, for another heat, completely vulnerable, and weak. And used all over again.

His eyes go to the ceiling, he lets his mind drift, lets himself go to that place, *away*, like he's always done before. That place he never thought he'd have to go to again.

And then, just like that, it's over.

Not his heat, but Jeongin, *his pup*- ripped away from him, clothes half-torn, held up flimsy by his hands as Minho's instincts go on overdrive. Protective, and possessive, snarling slightly at the intrusion, ready to fight. To kill, to do whatever. That feral need so strong, until he smells clove, and spice, and sees the younger omega with dark eyes on Jeongin, holding him practically by the scruff of

the neck.

It would be an amusing sight, considering how much bigger Jeongin is, if it weren't for his heat, the pain, and the seriousness of the situation.

"What do you think you're doing." Seungmin's voice isn't angry, it's worse, cold, the sharp edge of a knife.

Jeongin whimpers. "I- I was trying to help."

Seungmin growls back, "No, you were losing control, get out. I'll take care of hyung."

Minho watches, wide eyed as Seungmin kicks the young alpha out, shutting the door behind him, turning to Minho with worried, softer eyes.

"Hyung? Can you hear me?" Seungmin says carefully, slowly, moving further into the room, close to his bed, but not getting on, not touching.

It's a different kind of torture, all Minho wants is to touch him. To feel his skin, to have him under him. To help him.

"Y- Yeah." He replies, shaky, voice higher-pitched. Sweaty, feverish, and almost ruined already. He's so wet, and hard, and too much.

He feels no embarrassment, or shame now, just need.

The fear is gone too.

He's not going anywhere, either, he's right here. With Seungmin.
His omega.

His mate.

"I've got emergency suppressants." Seungmin continues. "I will get them for you."

"No!" He half-growls, half-cries.

Seungmin stops, stays right here, leans in, face pinched and worried. “Hyung, if you don’t have them, you’ll have to go through the entirety of your heat.”

“I’m... too late... Called Dr. S- Seo, and she said I- I can’t.” He tries to explain.

Seungmin’s face falls, angry, frustrated, then so concerned, and empathetic in understanding. “Fuck.” He curses out loud.

Minho feels the corner of his lips upturn ever so slightly at the familiarity of the other. Of the feelings growing warm, and deep for him.

“Shit, okay, then do you want to be alone?”

He whines, shakes his head. “I- I want- wait, what a- about Innies?” Worry, and protective fear rises within him, eyes to the door. “He okay?”

Seungmin’s face does something incredulous. “He’s fine, hyung. Chan’s on his way home, he’ll deal with it.”

He shakes his head quickly in turn. “Not- Not his fault, Minnie. It’s not. I just- I wanted to get it over with. If I try to h- hide it, it’s worse.”

Seungmin’s face goes through those emotions again, and something else, deep, aching, pained. He leans in, closer than ever. “Hyung, you never have to go through a heat with an alpha, ever again if you don’t want to, okay? I’ll kill anyone who tries if that’s not what you want. Please, tell me what you want now, do you want to be alone?”

“No.” He shakes his head, this much is clear to him.

Eyes drifting down the collarbone peeking out from Seungmin’s shirt.

Seungmin’s eyes follow, and then the younger omega tilts his head, a sly smile on his lips, an adorable almost shy blush on his cheeks at the same time. The contrast is too endearing, Minho’s heart pangs

in his chest.

“What do you want, hyung?” Seungmin presses in closer, the heat too much now, tension too thick. His desire is overwhelming, his need visceral, feral. It’s something he’s never had before, never been allowed to have. It feels amazing, intoxicating. Impossible.

“Can’t. I can’t.” He manages.

“Can’t what, hyung?” Seungmin says, voice softer, more gentle. “You can have anything, I’ll give it to you. I’ll make sure.”

Minho looks away, writhing slightly in the bed, too overwhelmed, too desperate and feral with instinct, but also too ashamed. Too worried to take if Seungmin isn’t willing to give. He’d never do that to someone, not ever.

“I can- I can do it alone.” He says.

“But, you don’t have to, hyung, if you don’t want to. Do you want to be alone? Tell me, Minho-hyung, please.”

“N- No.” He whimpers a little. “I-”

“Come on, tell Seungmin what you want, hyung.”

“I want you.” He admits, tears of pain, overwhelming emotion, and overstimulating desire take hold.

Seungmin’s hands are so gentle when they touch him, wiping the tears away, cupping his cheeks until they face each other, and Seungmin says confidently, but still with that shy press just below in the corners of his features, “I want you, too.”

Minho blinks, eyelashes fluttering in complete confusion. “R- Really?”

Seungmin nods, cheeks dusting cutely. “I’ve wanted you since I first saw you... Wanted you more after I got to know you...”

“How?”

“Well, I’d like you to be inside me, hyung.” Seungmin says bluntly.

“That’s- That’s not what I meant.” Minho counters, but his skin is even hotter now, and he can feel his cock throbbing at the thought of that. Feel the slick wetting the bed even more. The confusion at such a thought is, a lot, but the heat is too much, he’s in too deep.

“Can I?”

Seungmin nods, and they move together, deeper into the bed.

Seungmin is straddling him, and Minho’s licking his lips asking, “Can I kiss you?”

He’s never kissed anyone before like this.

Feels Seungmin nodding adorably, before he leans up, and the younger omega leans in. Their lips press together, slotting almost perfectly, before Minho feels himself growing more bold. His tongue presses along the bottom lip of the other, making him moan gently, before he presses in deeper, finds his tongue. Feels the first orgasm slowly roll through him as Seungmin’s hips roll against his. The press of his cock trapped delicious against his thigh, the friction perfect, as they shed clothes slowly, and carefully.

The kisses are languid, and then heated and urgent, pressing against each other as they go. Wringing orgasm after orgasm from each other, until Minho is hugging Seungmin close to his body, and pressing a finger inside him.

“Okay?” He murmurs, a little more coherent after coming, but not by much. Soon his heat will take over completely, he’ll be more feral, more lost.

Seungmin nods into his shoulder. “Y- Yeah, a- another, hyung, *ah*.”

He pushes in two, carefully, deeper inside the omega, feels his body tremble in his arms, kisses his skin, soothes him with his other hand rubbing along his back. Pushing in, scissoring, finding that spot that makes Seungmin cry out, and tremble, coming just from touching him there so deep and intimately inside.

“So perfect, baby.” Minho murmurs, and presses in a third.

“H- Hyung, f- fuck.” Seungmin moans, as Minho carefully flips them over, feels the younger omega’s legs spread, wrapping around him.

It feels too good, too natural to do this way even though he never has before.

He never knew it could be this good.

“Can I put it in, baby?” He whispers hotly between them, as he leans in, slotting their lips together once more, pulling away as Seungmin nods shakily his consent.

Minho slowly pushes his cock in, it’s so fucking wet.

They both are, it’s a mess, too wet almost, but it’s good.

It feels amazing, the heat around his cock as he slips completely inside, so tight and perfect as he holds Seungmin close, and begins to thrust inside him. Rock his hips, pushing his cock deeper in. His own hole leaks slick, and clenches, begging to be filled too, but he ignores it. Being inside Seungmin is pure ecstasy, and more than that, it’s like something clicking into place he never thought would.

“Hh... ah! M- more, h- hyung.” Seungmin cries out.

Minho thrusts in faster, deeper, kissing Seungmin as he does so, wet messy, tastes both their overwhelmed tears.

“You feel so good inside, Seugmin-ah.” He praises. “Taking me so well, you okay?”

“Y- yeah..hh... j- just... I’ve never- no one’s been inside me before, hyung. O- only you.” Seungmin says.

Minho pauses a little, and then leans in, foreheads pressing together as his cock pulsates inside Seungmin, buried deep within him. “*baby.*” His voice cracks.

Seungmin blinks up at him, eyes hazy, full of pleasure. “Shut up.” He says, voice cracking, emotional and full of love and desire. Fingers curling in Minho’s hair, pressing their lips back together. “Just fuck me, hyung, please... you feel good inside me, okay? Only

you... only my luna...”

He groans, feels that shudder through him as he does as Seungmin asks, fucking into him harder, and faster, feeling his own orgasm about to hit him again.

“I- Is it helping?” Seungmin asks. “Or do you need...?”

“Only n- need you.” He tells him, honestly. “I- I’m getting deeper in it, don’t- don’t know how long until I’m...”

“I know.” Seungmin whispers rough between them. “It’s okay. Want you. Wanted you for so long, you feel so good inside, hyung. Please, stay inside me during your heat.”

He moans, and thrusts in deep, feels Seungmin’s body tremble, coming with a cry. Feels himself not far behind, a few more thrusts, and he comes inside the younger omega shakily, hand stroking the younger through it.

They lay together, a mess, until he can feel his cock growing thicker. Can feel the heat getting stronger, can feel his inner omega taking over.

Every move after, entirely instinct-driven.

-

There’s food, somehow there is.

It’s left outside, and Minho can feel himself growling low, threatening, and a warning all in one when Seungmin ventures even a little outside to grab it. But there’s no one there, and it smells faintly of familiar lavender. It eases him, and his instincts considerably. Besides, his omega needs to eat.

He won’t accept the food until Seungmin does, until the omega smiles amused, pleased, and a little in love in a soft way Minho knows Seungmin rarely shows the world, let alone anyone. “Alright, okay, hyung, I’ll eat first, then you, okay?”

He nods easily, something easing within him when Seungmin eats,

drinks water, and seems better.

He eats next, licking the food off of Seungmin's fingers, making the younger omega blush hotly, despite everything they've done together. He looks innocent then, young, delectable. And Minhø is starving. He eats, and then he wraps his arms around his mate, and presses him into the bed, but it's not quite right either.

Growling a little in frustration, words fail him, but Seungmin seems to understand, hand reaching out, running down his hair, warmly along his back. His eyes shut against the blissful feeling, breathing slowly, more like- as if he's really... *purring*.

Feels Seungmin's sharp intake of breath at it, but he doesn't stop.

"Need your nest, hyung, can you show me?" He says slowly, carefully, as if he somehow always knew this wasn't it.

Minho supposes he would, his own eyes opening lazily, meeting Seungmin's gaze. A small nudge in his chest, against this, but a bigger pull for it. His arms curl around, hands along the younger omega, pulling him along through the bedroom, into the bathroom, hesitating only a moment longer before he opens the door to the small closet. Feels Seungmin's gaze hot on the back of his neck, then moving to the nest, haphazard, small, filled with items from the pack he borrowed, and forgot to give back.

The longer he stares without saying anything, the more Minhø feels doubt creep in, and the instincts form a whine building in the back of his throat. Hand tightening on the door to shut it, but Seungmin's voice is awe-filled, purring, "It's perfect, hyung, can I?"

His eyes widen, turning to Seungmin who seems entranced, heady with the need to be in his head omega's nest.

Minho feels himself grow happy, giddy, his omega is purring deeper, more content. And will be complete, once he has his omega safe inside his nest, has him in his arms, himself deep inside him. Keeping him nice and full, and safe, and perfectly happy on his cock.

Stupid alphas, can't satisfy his omega.

"Mine." He says, and Seungmin's cheeks are red as he nods, smirking a little.

"Yeah, hyung, I'm yours." His words come out softer though, accepting, asking all at once. Like, he's never done it before. Not even with his alphas.

Minho's heart skips, cock heart, slick leaking, he feels feral, and his heart is on fire.

"Come here, baby." Some humanity comes back to him, arms curling around the younger, taking care of him, pressing him inside.

It's too small for anyone else, just them does it fit, and Minho mourns the loss of having his other omegas in here one day.

"Maybe... maybe you'll feel comfortable making a bigger one somewhere else, and Jisung-ah, and Felix-ah can come in." Seungmin says, looking up shyly, and yet bold. His personality striking through, as he tilts his head, *submitting*, "Please, head omega, think about it?"

Minho feels feral at the sight, so protective, possessive, and in love he feels crazed.

"My mate, my good, perfect omega. Always taking care of everyone, now it's my turn, understand? I'll take care of all of you, my *omegas*."

"Yours."

"Can I...?"

"Please, please, hyung, need your omega cock inside me. Only you."

He groans, and spreads Seungmin's legs carefully, pushing in with all the care and tenderness in the world. Fully seated in his deep heat, and his love, they stare at one another, before their lips meet, kissing thickly, deeply, full of passionate longing, and the reality of years of this lost missing piece, only fitting together until this very

moment.

“Ah! ah! p- please, right there.”

“Mine. My Seungmin-ah, my omega, my mate.”

“Y- Yours. All y- yours, hyung.”

He moans, and kisses him, open mouthed, hot, as they come together, over and over. Messy, wet, and perfect.

-

As his heat recedes, he lays there, Seungmin in his arms, surrounded by all their scents, the pack's too, and feels so strange, so different. Not like himself, and yet exactly that. More of himself than he ever thought he could be, or feel.

He stares at Seungmin's features, feels his hand reach out, wanting to trace them, but pulls back deciding against it.

“You can touch, hyung.” Seungmin says, eyes still shut, clearly exhausted.

Slowly, though, they open.

Minho gulps. “I-”

Seungmin's hand touches his, bringing it along his cheek, until their eyes lock deeply. The younger omega, smirks, “getting shy after you were just inside me, already?”

His skin burns hot at the accusation. “Seungmin-ah.” He tries to sound stern, he fails. He's smiling, matching Seungmin's carefree grin full of unfettered happiness. His emotions get stronger, more intense, and he has to say, broken whispered, and earnest, “thank you.”

“No, hyung, thank you.” Seungmin says, eyes uncharacteristically soft. “I never thought... I never thought it could be good, you know?”

He nods quickly, knowing all too well, heart squeezing. “Was it?”

“It was amazing, hyung.” He chuckles, shyly. “You?”

“Perfect.”

They meet in the middle, tender, slow, almost cautious. Their lips slot together, but it's different. It's almost like a first kiss. They pull away too soon. And Minho becomes bold, for the first time in years, his fingers reach up, curl into Seungmin's hair as he says, “tell me if you want me to stop, and I will.” That simple sentence meaning so much more to the both of them, lump in his throat for a moment because of it, something similar in Seungmin's eyes as well, before he brings their lips together more strongly. More heated, more filled with emotion, tongue swiping at the younger's bottom lip, making them both moan as they taste each other again, as they fall deeper into it, and each other.

“*Seungmin-ah.*” He says, panting as they pull apart, foreheads pressing together. “You've changed me.”

Seungmin's daze eyes turn sharper. “Yeah? Ditto.”

They laugh together, and it's kind of perfect, smiling as they kiss again, as they pull to wrap around each other, burrowing into the other's warmth, scents, everything.

Minho clings to him, clove mixing with yuzu scent, something slotting perfectly into place.

“Tell me about the case you're working on. I know you've been dying to tell someone.”

“Well, yes! It's insane, hyung, because...”

He listens, intently, holds him closer, breathing each other in. Fully, content.